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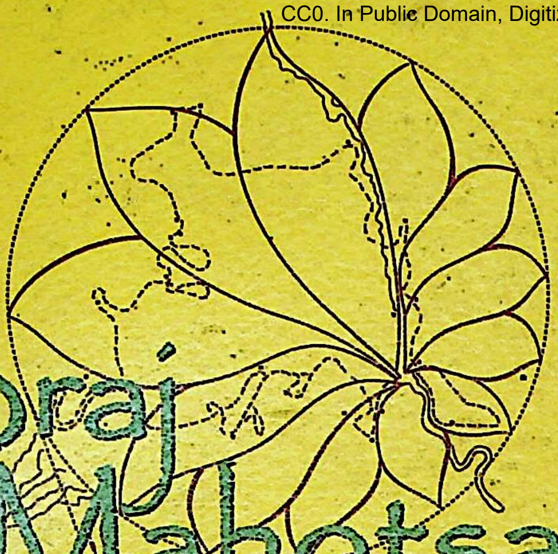

Braj Mahotsav

ब्रज समुद्र मथुरा
कमल वृन्दावन मकरन्द

21 Nov - 8 Dec 2009
IGNCA, New Delhi

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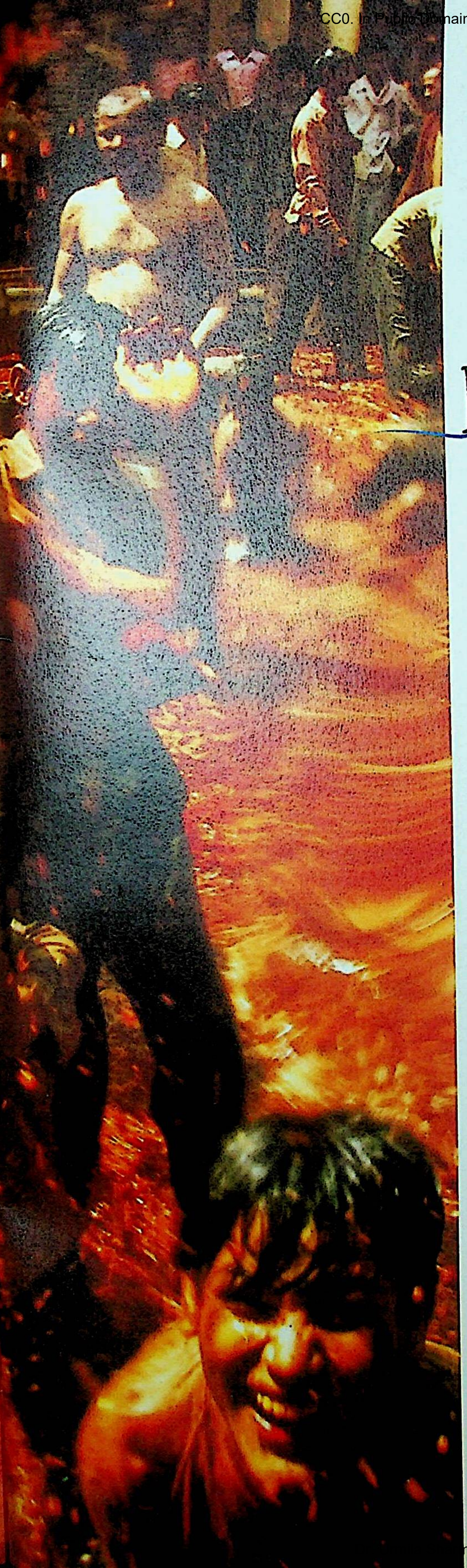

Braj Mahotsav

21 Nov - 8 Dec 2009
IGNCA, New Delhi

Organised by

INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
and
SRI CAITANYA PREMA SAMSTHANA

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ब्रज–बृन्दावन

यस्यावरोधस्तनचन्दनानां प्रक्षालनाद्वारिविहारकाले।
कलिन्दकन्या मधुरांगतापि गङ्गोर्मिसंसृक्त जलेवभाति।।

त्रस्तेन ताक्ष्यात्किल कालियेन मणिं विसृष्टं यमुनौकसा यः।
वक्षस्थलव्यापिरूचं दधानः सकौस्तुभं ह्रपेयतीव कृष्णम्।।

संभाव्य भर्त्तारममुं युवानं मृदु प्रवालोत्तर पुष्पशय्ये।
वृन्दावने चैत्ररथादनूनें निर्विश्यतां सुन्दरि यौवनश्रि।।

अध्यास्य चाम्भः पृषतोक्षतानि शैलेय गन्धीनि शिलातलानि।
कलापिनां प्रावृषि पश्य नृत्यं कान्तासु गोवर्धन कन्दरासु।।

रघुवंश, कालिदास

इहे तेरे बृंदाबन बाग
सुनि राधिके कदंब बिटप की साषा, एक अमी फल लाग
स्याम पीत कछु अरूण छबि, बरने न जाही अंग विभाग
अति सुपक्व मुरली के परसत, चुइ–चुइ परत उमडि रस–राग
ब्रज–बनिता बर–बारि कनकमय, रोकै रहत सुधा सुर नाग
तुव प्रताप छुइ सकत न सुंदरि, सुक मुनि मरकट कोकिल काग
मैं मालिनि जतननि जल जुगयौ, सीचत सुहथ परे हैं दाग
'सूर' सुश्रम उठि देषि नयन भरि, पिउ पिउष अवनी के भाग

सूरदास

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Contents

The Tree and the Fruit: Vraja Prakalpa and Braj Mahotsav 5

Braj Mahotsav: An Introduction 7

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts 8

Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana 9

Braj: What? by Shrivatsa Goswami 11

Braj Mahotsav: an eight petalled lotus 29

The landscape - ब्रज—भूमि 30

The visitors and custodians - ब्रज—रसिक 34

The built heritage - ब्रज—वैभव 38

The literary heritage - ब्रज—वाङ्मय 42

The artistic offerings - ब्रज—सेवा 46

The pilgrimage - ब्रज—यात्रा 50

The waters - ब्रज—धारा 54

The future - ब्रज—भविष्य 58

Acknowledgements 60

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ब्रज संस्कृति सूत्र

सच्ची ब्रज संस्कृति मध्ययुग के बहके हुए व्यक्तियों का कर्म से बच निकलने का मार्ग नहीं है. यह तो भारतवर्ष के कई सहस्र वर्षों के धार्मिक इतिहास के प्रचण्ड मंथन से उत्पन्न हुआ मक्खन था, अथवा समुद्र में तैरता हुआ सुन्दर कमल था जिसने देश को समन्बय, सुप्रीति, और समवाय का सुन्दर संदेश दिया. यह वह महायान या चौड़ा मार्ग था, जिस पर संकीर्णता को दूर करके सबको चलाने का निमंत्रण दिया गया.इस महायान की पताका पर यह मंत्र लिखा था–

हरि को भजे सो हरि का होई

इन्हीं दीप्तिपटों से तो समाज के मन में नया प्रकाश भरा जाता रहा, जिसके भरने वाले अनके ध्यानी, ज्ञानी, अभ्यासी, आचारपूत तपस्वी, संत–महात्मा और भक्त थे. वे ही ब्रज संस्कृति के संस्थापक थे. इसी संस्कृति के मार्ग से लोक के छटपटाते मन को नया प्राणवायु पहुँचाता रहा. मतवाद की चाहारदीवारी के लौह–प्राचीरों ने जब जीवन को रूँध दिया था, तब ब्रज की प्रेम–भक्ति–प्रधान संस्कृति ने सब प्राणियों के लिए जीवन को रहने के योग्य बनाया और मानव के प्रति श्रद्धा का पाठ पढ़ाया. समाज में जो सहस्र वर्षों से पशु बने थे वे इस संस्कृति की कृपा से पर्वत लाघने लगे, जो अंधे बने थे वे सब कुछ देखने लगे, जो बहरे थे उनके कान कर्तव्य, सम्मान, मर्यादा के संदेश सुनने के लिए खुल गये, और जो गूँगे थे उनके कंठों में स्वर आ गया. ऐसे बंधन मुक्त कंठों के गान आज भी भारत की सांस्कृतिक निधि में रत्नों की भाँति सुपूजित हैं– इस संस्कृति के द्वारा की गई ईश्वर के चरणों की वंदना ऐसी सुखदाई और सिद्धि को देने वाली हुई–

बंदौ श्रीहरि पद सुखदाई।
जाकी कृपा पंगु गिरि लंघै,
अंधरे को सब कछु दरसाई।
बहिरौ सुनै मूक पुनि बोले,
रंक चलै सिर छत्र धराई।

मनुष्य ने जहाँ आपस में विभेद डाला था, वहीं ईश्वर के चरणों की करूणा उन्हें मिलाने वाली सुधा सिद्ध हुई।

–पंडित वासुदेव शरण अग्रवाल

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The Tree and Fruit: Vraja Prakalpa and Braj Mahotsav

Twenty-two years ago, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, the founder trustee and the conceptualizer of the plan and programmes of the IGNCA, conceived long-term, multidisciplinary projects which would make manifest the many complex processes of intellectual and artistic discourses in India which question the theoretical premises of binary opposites. Amongst these projects were two which specifically sought to unravel the nature of the dialogue and symbiosis which takes place in particular regions of India , especially in the medieval period. The region of Vrindavan was identified in the North as was Tanjore in the South.

Over the last two decades in close collaboration with Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana (SCPS), Vrindavan, it has carried out a significant programme to unravel the political dimensions of the establishment of a young city state called Brindavan gifted by Akbar. By doing so it reflected the dialogue between the imperial state of Delhi and Rajasthan. But more importantly, the project identified several centripetal and centrifugal forces. Besides political dialogue, there was a dialogue at the cultural level. While scholarship so far had concentrated attention largely on the Vaishnava sampradayas, especially the Vallabhacharyas, this project distinctly probed in depth the role of the Gosvamis, following Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, to give a new turn to theories of Indian aesthetics, music and mysticism.

Vrindavan in its seeming simplicity and flow is full of complexities. The IGNCA in its programme, in collaboration with SCPS, structured the project into many modules. As a result, it brought out a major volume entitled: Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone. Prof. Irfan Habib looked at the primary land grant. Prof. Monika Boehm-Tettlebach looked at the primary source material of Rajasthan. Prof. Nalini Thakur prepared measured drawings of other temples. Annotated edition of the work of the Gosvamis - Bhaktirasamrtasindhu edited and translated in Hindi by the late Prof. Premlata Sharma, into English by Prof David Haberman; Ujjvala Nilamani and Nataka Candrika --now carried on by Dr. Urmila Sharma – have been published.

Vrindavan is a living tradition: Sanjhis are still made. A volume Evening Blossoms: The Temple Tradition of Sanjhi in Vridavana was brought out.

It is in order to place before the contemporary audiences in Delhi that this Mahotsav is bein organized, in which there is re-location of the vibrant culture of Braj in the precincts of IGNCA. The scholars, Prof. Irfan Habib, Prof. Nalini Thakur, Prof. John S. Hawley, Dr. Umesh Chandra Sharma, Dr. Urmila Sharma, Prof. Monika Boehm-Tettlebach, Shrivatsa Goswami who have been working in the fields, will be present. There will be a photographic exhibition of Jagadish Lal Goswami, Robyn Beeche, Abhinava Goswami, Fazal Sheikh and other photographers' works. Phul Bangalas and Sanjhis will be recreated.

Also there will be concerns of immediate contemporary relevance in regard to the conservation of the heritage, the cleaning of the Jamuna and revisiting and re-questioning how sacred places in India pose a problem of physical pollution.

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"The people are of a soft and easy nature and delight to perform meritorious works with a view to a future life. The soil is rich and fertile and specially adapted to the cultivation of grain. Cotton stuff of fine texture are also here obtainable and gold."

- Hwen Tsang

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Braj Mahotsav: An Introduction

Braj is a fountainhead and the source of that running stream which has spread throughout the length and breadth of the canvas of Indian culture. It is a home, not only to the cultural expressions centering on the Vaishnava/Krishna experience, but also to Jain and Buddhist literature, art and architecture. It has been a witness to Greek and Islamic cultural interactions, seamlessly integrating them into its fabric.

The creation of Vrindavan as an independent town and revenue entity at the end of the 16th century was Akbar's gift to the Goswamis of Vrindavan. Braj, the geographical area between Delhi and Agra, had been home from time immemorial to the *adi-shrota* and *anubhava* of Indian culture, including mythological figures such as the *Yakshas, Nagas, Matrikas* and others. Even today, Braj is their living home.

It was against this historic and cultural background that collaboration between IGNCA and SCPS, was initiated in 1987. Through sustained intellectual investigation and two successful international conferences, the *Vraja Prakalpa* project brought to light the various aspects of the culturally rich sacred region of Braj. Some of the important publications brought under this programme are *Vraja Nathdvara Prakalpa* (a project profile), *Govindadeva: A dialogue in Stone, In Favour of Govinddevaji - Historical Document relating to deity of Vrindaban and Eastern Rajasthan, Evening Blossoms: The Temple Tradition of Sanjhi in Vrindavan, Bhaktirasamritasindhu* (Hindi tr. 2 vols., English tr. 1 vol.) and *Ujjvala Nilamani* (3 vols., forthcoming). Two important exhibitions, Govindadeva: A dialogue in Stone and Living Culture of Vraja, had also been organized in the past under this project.

The on-going *Vraja Prakalpa* project, undertaken as part of IGNCA's Kshetra Sampada programme, envisages the study, not only of a singular unit such as a specific place or a temple, but its impact on the people and the entire interlocking of the devotional, artistic, geographic, social and economic aspects of the sacred centre. Braj also offers an example of how sacred geographies become mobile spaces through an intervention of pilgrims and devotees, who take back home along with them paraphernalia related with these sacred sites including maps, which are both geographical and cultural by nature. They find a proud place in the home shrines of devotees and provide them with a continual *darshan* of the deities and their sacred abode. This mobility of sacred centres forms an important area of investigation of the *Kshetra Sampada* programme.

With the rich experience gained since the inception of this project, Braj Mahotsav offers an opportunity to elucidate and unravel processes that impact upon the capacity for continual regeneration and renewal of a cultural region. It reflects upon the modern day discourse attached to the preservation of heritage. Contemporary Braj displays the continuity of a rich and varied past, which is reflected in the quantum of human populace visiting the region today. The Braj Mahotsav underlines the importance of these vibrant processes.

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Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), established in the memory of Smt. Indira Gandhi, in 1987, is visualised as an autonomous centre encompassing the study and experience of all the arts -- each form with its own integrity, yet within a dimension of mutual inter-dependence, inter-relatedness with nature, the social structure and cosmology.

This view of the arts, integrated with and essential to the larger matrix of human culture, is predicated upon Smt. Gandhi's recognition of the role of the arts as essential to the 'integral quality of a person, at home with himself and society.' It partakes of the holistic world-view so forcefully articulated throughout the Indian tradition and emphasized by modern Indian leaders, especially Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore.

The IGNCA's view of the arts encompasses a wide area of studies, such as creative and critical literature, written and oral; the visual arts, ranging from architecture, sculpture, painting and graphics to general material culture; photography and film; the performing arts of music, dance and theatre in their broadest connotation; and all else in festivals, fairs and in lifestyles that has an artistic dimension. It is in the Centre's agenda to explore, study and revive the dialogue between India and her neighbours, especially in the South and South East Asia, in areas pertaining to the arts.

The uniqueness of the IGNCA's approach to the arts lies in the fact that it does not segregate the folk and the classic, the oral and the aural, the written and the spoken, and the old and the modern. Here the emphasis is on the connectivity and the continuity between the various fields that ultimately relate human-to-human and human-to-nature.

The IGNCA manifests its academic, research work in its publications, international and national seminars, conferences, exhibitions and lecture series. The schools and other education institutions are within the focus of the outreach programme of the IGNCA.

To fulfill the objectives outlined in the Conceptual Plan of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and its principal aims, its functions are organized through five divisions that are autonomous in structure but inter-locked in programming.

The *Kala Nidhi* Division comprises a Reference Library of multi-media collections, which includes printed books, slides, microfilms, photographs and audio-visual material, a conservation laboratory, a multi-media unit and the Cultural Archives.

The *Kala Kosha* Division undertakes fundamental research and investigates the intellectual traditions in their dimensions of multi-layers and multi-disciplines. As a research and publication division, it endeavours to place the arts within the integral framework of a cultural system, combining the textual with the oral, the visual with the aural, and theory with practice.

The *Janapada Sampada* Division complements the programmes of *Kala Kosha*. Its focus shifts from the text to the context of the rich variegated heritage of the rural and the small scale societies. Its activities focus on the lifestyle study programmes comprising of the *Loka Parampara*, which revolves around a community, and the *Kshetra Sampada*, which revolves round a region.

The *Kala Darshana* Division provides a forum for inter-disciplinary seminars, exhibitions and performances on unified themes and concepts. *Bal Jagat*, the programme for children, comes under this division's activities.

The Cultural Informatics Laboratory (CIL) acts as a focal point for digitization of rare manuscripts, books, photographs, slides and audio-video collection not only of IGNCA but also the other organizations working in the Department of Culture.

The *Sutradhara* Division provides administrative, managerial and organizational support and services to all the other Divisions.

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Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana

For those eager to study the culture of Braj, the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana (SCPS), founded in 1972 in Vrindavan, is a haven for spiritual and cultural studies. Legend has it that Gambhira, residence of Savai Jaisingh before founding of Jaipur, which hosts the SCPS, was the very spot where on the banks of the river Yamuna, Krishna and Radha met for their evening trysts.

The Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana has long recognized the need for fostering Braj culture. Towards this end, it has created facilities for the documentation and preservation of the varied artifacts of this culture through its facilities: an archive of photo transparencies of the architectural monuments, and documentation of the festivals and saints of Braj. The archive also houses books and manuscripts.

To foster the cultural heritage of Braj, which is itself the heart of the culture of northern India, not only are preservation activities necessary, but efforts to train practitioners, and to continue to improve the quality of the cultural artifacts must be accorded priority. Although the parent art form of the ras-lila, Dhrupad, has suffered a decline, the ras-lila has shown considerable tenacity in continuing as a major dynamic life-force for Braj culture and religion. In the last thirty years, the ras-lila has given birth to another offshoot known as Caitanya-lila, which presents the enactment of the life and teachings of the great bhakti saint Sri Krishna-Caitanya Mahaprabhu. The first scripts for this innovation were produced in Vrindavan in a collaboration between Sri Purushottam Goswami, founder and president of the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana, and Baba Premananda, a great saint and devotee of "Rasa Bihari" Krishna depicted in the ras-lila. The Caitanya-lila has become so popular as to rival the ancient tradition of Krishna-lila.

As part of its continuing efforts, Dhrupad Samarohas have been held by the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana since 1979. These consist of workshops and recitals, normally continuing for a week. Regular Dhrupad classes began in the winter of 1982.

All these activities, coming together, brought about the birth of a long-standing dream: the creation of the Vraja Kala Gurukula, established to foster in every way possible the traditional arts of Braj, which are parent to many varied forms of cultural expression throughout the Indian subcontinent.

The international recognition of the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana's efforts in this field and of the activities of Sri Purushottam Goswami, who has been training rasa-mandalis for the past sixty years, was the European tour of Dhrupad and ras-lila, organized with the help of the Extra-European Arts Committee and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in 1983 and participation at the Festival of India in France in 1986.

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Braj: What? by Shrivatsa Goswami

The Vedas characterize Braj as a land "where cows with big horns roam aplenty". Geographically, its core is defined by the presence of Mount Govardhan, the forests of Vrindavan and the river Yamuna running north to south, dividing it into eastern and western halves.

Braj (Sanskrit: *Vraja*) lies between Delhi and Agra. Not confined to the modern district of Mathura, Braj extends quite a distance into portions of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and another hundred and more kilometers east of Mathura across the river Yamuna.

What is it in this geography that makes Braj "Braj" a glorious, sacred and extremely busy destination, visited by millions of people year after year?

Braj is "Braj" because of its visitors, a fact that even its local residents acknowledge. In the *Bhagavata Purana*, the Gopis declare that Braj attained its glory ever since Krishna was born and lived here.

Who was Krishna and why did he move to Braj? The Upanisads identify Krishna as the absolute reality; he is *rasa*, who was only partially manifested in the eternal space.

He longed to be the object of the aesthetic experience which was available only to devotees. Hence, desirous of becoming the taster, he appeared in Braj.

On arriving there, what Krishna found was completely the opposite of what he had heard praised. The waters of Braj were poisonously polluted. Forests were on fire. Tornadoes were gripping the land. Economic, social, political and religious behaviour was guided by greed and exploitation, rather than *rasa*.

Despite all this, Krishna, in his passionate insanity, did not return to his celestial abode for comfort and grandeur. Rather he decided to create what he did not find.

With the magic mantra of hard work and with love and service, he first restored the five natural elements of nature and effected their total harmony. He then applied what we know now as the Gandhian ethos of a "need-based economy" and a democratic rule of justice.

Krishna's concept of social structure was not determined by the then popular caste-by-birth classification but was rather uniquely based on professional qualities. As Gopal, a servant of cows, he did not allow the exploitation of animals in the name of religion. He also did not hesitate to dislodge meaningless ritualism of the worship of ecological Gods and Goddesses, like Govardhan, Vrinda Devi and Yamuna Devi, cows, and so forth.

Once these basics were in place, Krishna found the time to celebrate Love and Beauty. In the spirit of Braj (*vraja* means "to move"), he moved from Gokul to Vrindavan, from the nomadic settlements to the forests and groves where he could manifest and celebrate the universality of love. In Vrindavan, the western half of Braj, nature, animals, birds, men and women, high and low, human and divine, all could freely participate in his *maharas*.

Braj-Vrindavan, though, could not keep him for long. He moved to Mathura, the seat of politics in Braj. Guided by democratic and republican political ideas, he restored popular rule.

But he soon realised that the bureaucracy in Mathura was unfit to serve the people. To inculcate the knowledge system of service (Sanskrit: *bhakti*) in the administration, he sent his prime minister, Uddhava, a great intellectual, to be trained under the gopis of Braj.

Uddhava did not lack in the masculine paths of knowledge and *karma*, but Krishna knew that these ways are incomplete if they are not grounded in the feminine *bhakti* -- the concept of service with love, and service as love.

Empowered by his new learning, Uddhava, on his return, took charge of Mathura, and Krishna moved away from Braj to apply such unique Braj practices outside Braj.

The sage Narada, who keeps a tab on happenings in the world, had heard about this knowledge system of love and service developed and applied by Krishna in Braj. On arriving to explore it, Narada found the area full of groves and water bodies, mountains, and the pure flow of the river Yamuna. Finally he wound his way to Vrindavan and met the Goddess Vrinda. Vrinda made him see Krishna's ras lilas but not before she ordered him to take a dip in her tank of feminity.

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Narada now became the female Naradi. This experience resulted in the production of the pathbreaking Narada Bhakti Sutras.

After the Mahabharat war and the return of Krishna to his celestial abode, his great-grandson Bajranabh was anointed as the ruler of Braj by the Pandavas. Only a hundred years after Krishna's departure, when Bajranabh took charge of Braj, he found that this area had been reduced to a wild forest with no habitation worth its name. Encouraged by King Parikshit, Bajranabh was moved to recreate and resurrect the places connected with Krishna's memory. In this project, sage Shandilya, the priest of the cowherds, helped them identify the sacred spots and special spaces. Thus, with foundation of temples, deities, settlements, water bodies, groves and plantations, Braj re-manifested itself.

A couple of millennia later, Bhagavan Gautam Buddha was attracted towards this holy centre. He was highly disappointed in his first visit, but with the perseverance of his followers like Katyayan and the legendary Upagupta, a native of Mathura, who became the teacher of Ashok the Great, Buddha was encouraged to find in Braj a rich soil in which to plant his Bodhivriksh. This was a tree that took instant roots and grew rapidly.

Similarly, the Jain tradition also found Braj to be a welcoming home. The first Tirthankara Bhagavan Rishabhnath was associated with this area. The twenty-second Tirthankara Bhagwan Neminath was born in Braj, and the Jainas propitiate him as Krishna's brother. The last Kevali, Jumbu Swami, did his penance at "Chaurasi", within the Caurasi kos Braj, to attain nirvana.

Thus enriched by the Vaishnav and Saiva, Jain and Bauddha traditions, the cultural cauldron of the Braj region grew in multiple directions. Mathura became the world-famous school of sculptors who supplied far and wide the sacred idols of all these traditions. The stupas, chaityas, vihars, sangharams and mandirs gave a fillip to architectural creativity. Literary conclaves were a regular feature. Fine and performing arts blossomed.

Varaha Mihira, in the sixteenth section of *Brihat Samhita*, includes the eastern half of Braj with all river lands under the protection of the planet Buddha (Mercury) and the western half "controlled by the purohits and the Bharatas and other managers of religious ceremonies under the tutelage of Vrihaspati (Jupiter)". Greek visitors like Megasthenes were overawed by the grandeur of Mathura and its territories and described it as "a city of Gods."

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The Sunga, the Saka, the Mauryas, the Kushans and later the Gupta rulers continuously nurtured Braj and carried its glory to even further heights. A grand monument was erected by the Guptas to celebrate Krishna's birth in Mathura.

Unfortunately, after the sixth century Mathura and its environs were devastated and plundered by the Hunas. The same act was repeated in the beginning of he eleventh century by Mohammad Gazni, and again at the end of thirteenth century by Allauddin Khilji. Later, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, the wrath of the Lodhis also did not spare this land. In all this, the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain institutions were all systematically weakened, if not destroyed.

In the early decades of the sixteenth century, Braj bhoomi attracted two visitors who rendered invaluable service for its restoration and recreation.

Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya landed here at the end of fifteenth century, and he was followed by Caitanya Mahaprabhu in 151516. For them Braj was available, of course, only as Mathura and a few surrounding pilgrimage centres. Despite its physical-geographical leanness, Braj was fully thriving in the theatre of memory. The Puranic tradition not only retained the lilas of Krishna, they beautifully bloomed in the *Bhagavata Purana*, especially with reference to Krishna's revelry and sports in Braj.

Between the Bhagavata and Mahaprabhu Caitanya, there had been several other visitors who had enriched Braj and strengthened it through their literary and artistic creations. Braj fired the imagination of our greatest poets Kalidas, Vilvamangala, Jayadeva, Vidyapati, Chandidas and many others who kept nourishing the myth of Braj.

In 1515, Caitanya Mahaprabhu reached Mathura, having access to the sacred geography (*bhav bhugol*) even though the physical correlates were, in fact, mostly missing. His predecessors like Ramanuja and Madhava were satisfied with their southern Vrindavans at Srirangam and Udipi. Others like Nimbarka and Vallabha created their own Vrindavans in safety, away from the routes of marauding armies.

With the help of text and context, Caitanya re-identified many locales of Krishna's pastimes in Braj, and the most important out of them happened to be Vrindavanthen a deserted peninsular tract, used only by the invading armies to hunt for wild boar. Caitanya, in his characteristic way, recreated Vrindavan, the heart of Braj, in the eye of a political and military storm. The present-day Vrindavan as a

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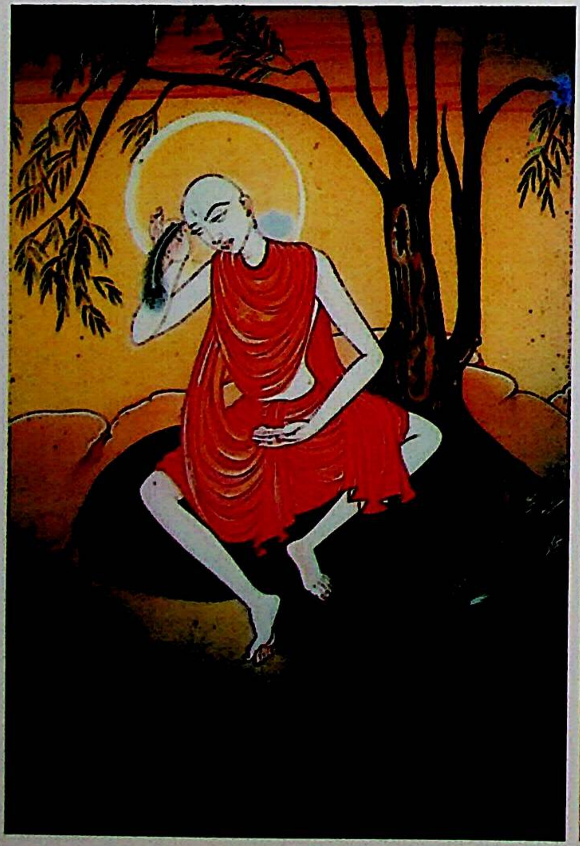
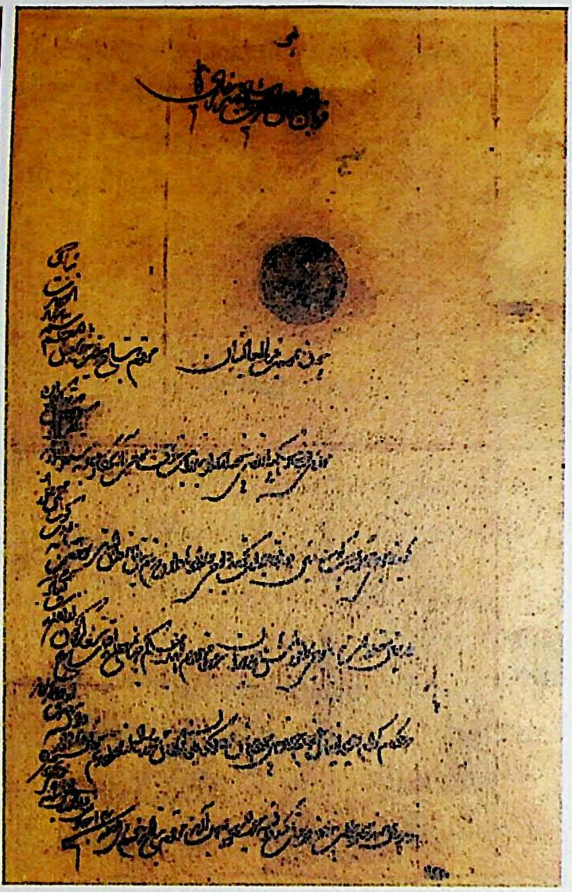
busy pilgrimage destination is a corollary to Caitanya's "madness."

How did Caitanya achieve this?

Caitanya had two options for the process of resurrecting Braj-Vrindavan. That process involved interacting with powers other than religious; he brought into his ambit the political, economic and cultural. This "other" at that time was predominantly Islamic. Caitanya's option was to confront it "diabolically" or interact "dialogically". Caitanya believed in the latter. As his strategy, he chose a team of capable managers who had the capabilities of handling the political powers that mattered most. Three out of his six trusted followers belonged to the courts. These Goswamis' dialogue with the powers that be resulted in recreation of Braj, and Vrindavan in particular. They encouraged Akbar to physically create Vrindavan as a revenue entity formally in 1596. But even before that, throughout Akbar's reign, Vrindavan had benefited from his dialogical sensitivity towards this centre of Hindu culture. The results were seen not only in the building of the grand monuments like Govind Dev and other impressive built edifices, but the Yamuna in the centre of the Vrindavan peninsula was also





embellished by a four-kilometer-long garland of ghats, chattris, and temples, thereby creating a unique riverside architecture unseen anywhere else. The Goswamis were joined by other "visitors" like Vitthalnath, Narayan Bhatt, Swami Haridas, Hariram Vyas, Hit Harivansh, Gadadhar Bhatt and several others.

With the active cooperation of the Mughal and Rajput courts, literature, philosophy, rituals, arts, crafts, music and drama flourished, reaching new heights.

These six Goswamis designated the famous trio of Narotthamdas Thakur, Shyamanand Prabhu and Shrinivas Acharya, as custodians of Braj, They took Vrindavan's literary, religious, philosophical and artistic creations of the sixteenth century and planted them from Assam to Manipur, Bengal to Orissa and Gujurat to Dera Ghazikhan in the north-western frontier provinces.

But the glory of the sixteenth century would not last forever in Braj. From the latter half of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, the area once again saw plunder and destruction on a large scale. But alongside this destruction, happily there were

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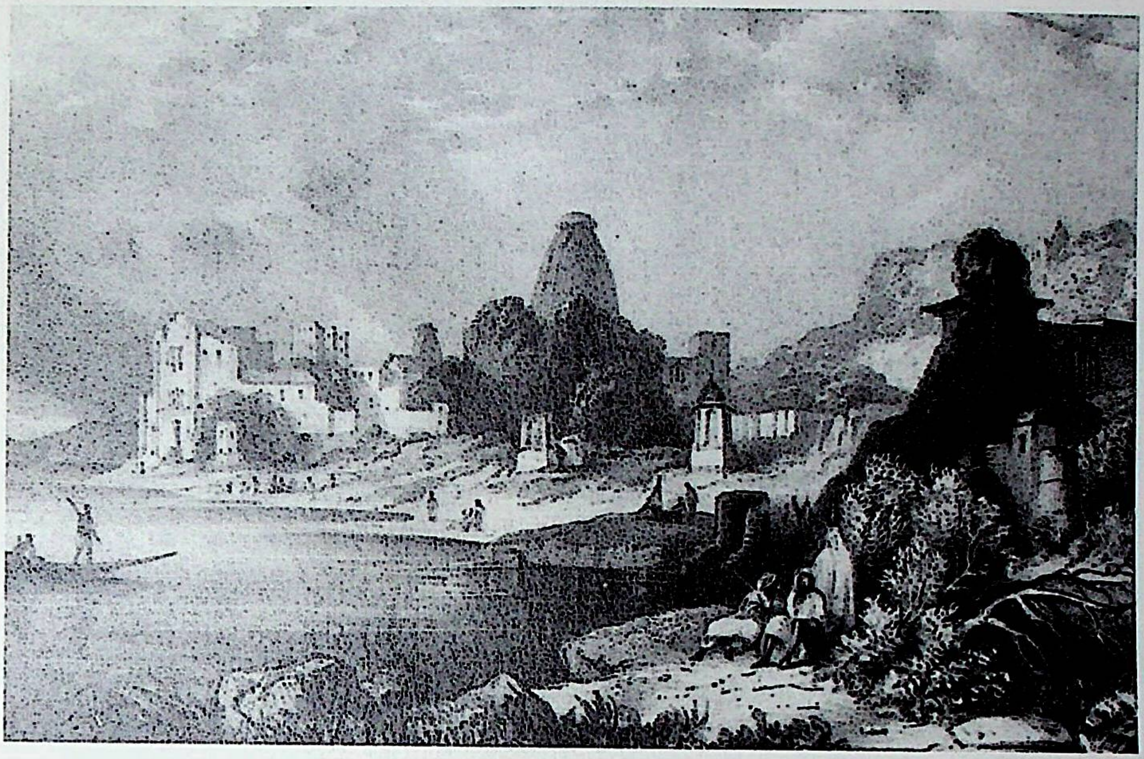

saviours and patrons, led notably by the royal rulers of Jaipur and Gwalior and the nobles of Bengal.

During the Mughal and British rule, Mathura attracted many European visitors. Christian missionaries focused on this Hindu holy land, and even today are a thriving community in the area. Mathura was blessed to have F. S. Growse as its District Magistrate and Collector. Growse not only repaired the wounds inflicted on Braj's built heritage, he also brought sanity in administration after India's first struggle for independence. He brought prosperity to the region with the creation of a network of roads and canals. In addition, his translation of the Hindu texts, his establishing an archaeological museum in Mathura, and his comprehensive gazeteer of the district titled "Mathura: A District Memoir" which, even after 125 years, remains a most useful tool for the study of Braj.

The latter half of nineteenth century saw the birth of the Arya Samaj in Mathura, where Dayananda Saraswati attained enlightenment. Vrindavan and Braj played a very important

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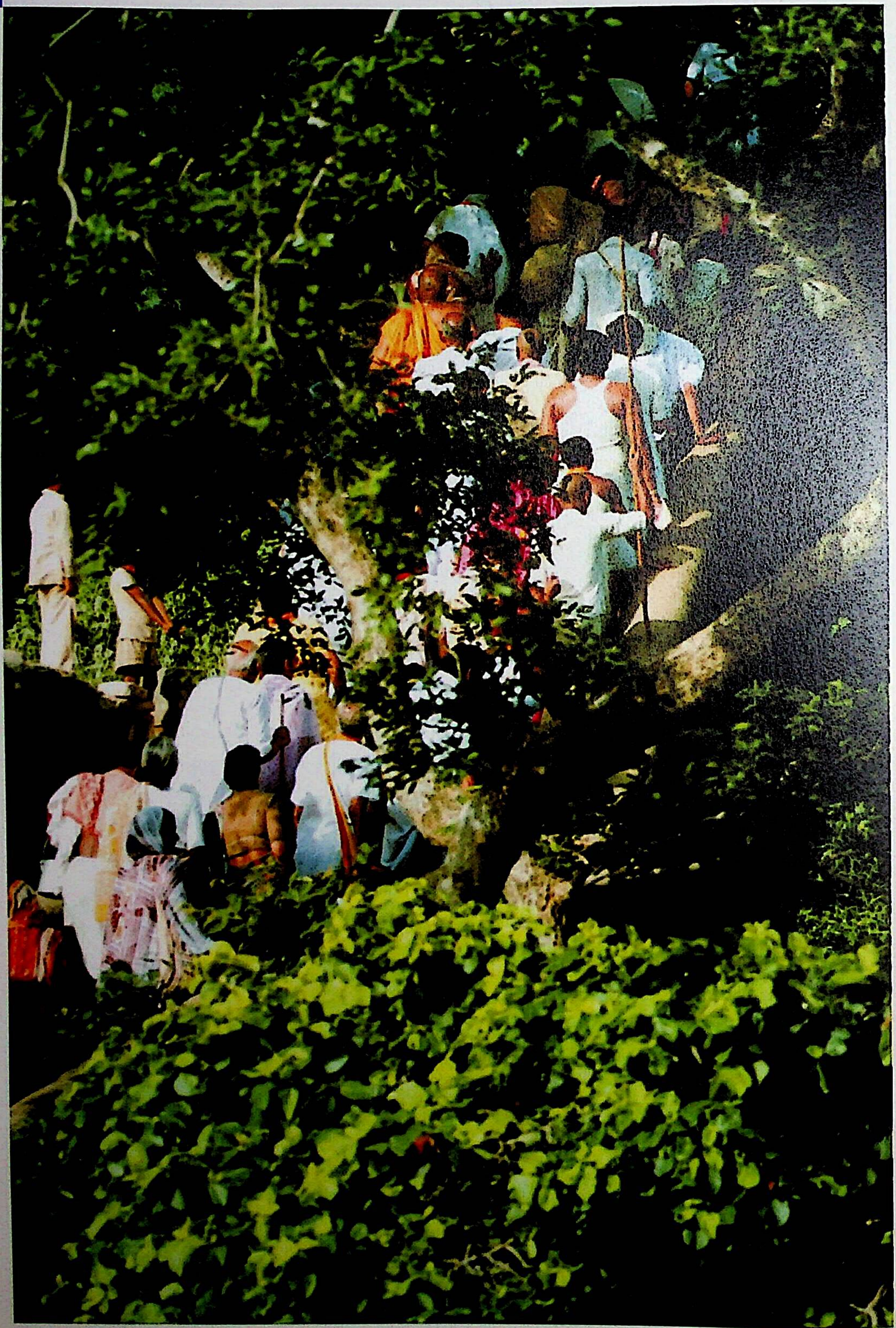

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role in the formation of the Ramakrishna Mission movement, a global phenomenon, which inspired Ramakrishna Paramahans, Ma Sharada and Swami Vivekanand during their stays in this region.

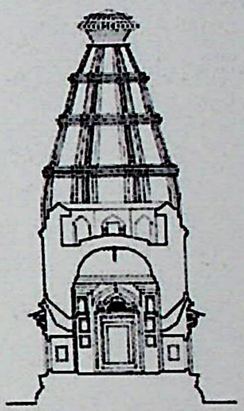
As recent as the mid-twenthieth century, Vrindavan sent a drum-beating sadhu to the United States, and this culminated in the formation of a global phenomenon called the ISKCON or Hare Krishna movement. Thus, the movement of the history and culture keeps moving on and on....

Even today, this fascinating living culture of Braj, despite its roller-coaster history, is an amazing phenomenon, which engages not only religious leaders and pilgrims but also writers and artists, politicians and businessmen. Most important, scholars and historians continue to be attracted towards some unique facet of Braj.

In 1987, the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Kalakendra (IGNCA) and Sri Caitanya Prema Sansthana (SCPS) initiated the process of academically revisiting the cultural richness of Braj. A serious and comprehensive documentation effort by SCPS grew into a rich archive of printed and audio-visual material that made it a natural home for scholars and researchers from India and abroad.

This collaborative effort, formally launched at the beginning of 1988, produced a series of monographs on temple arts, a series of translations of classical texts central to Braj, a compilation and publication of historic documents and a series of international seminars and multi-media exhibitions for exposing new audiences to the fascinating history and culture of Braj. A multi-lingual annotated bibliography on Braj has also been prepared.

Like Braj, Vraja Prakalpa is an ongoing academic project. Braj Mahotsav celebrates Braj through the offerings of Vraja Prakalpa. Mahotsav is not the culmination of this intellectual enterprise, but it becomes a fresh threshold for continuing the works still in progress and focussing upon the facets so far not covered in the matrix. This will include the editing and translation of important texts on dramaturgy; pilgrim vernacular texts detailing the history and geography covered by the Braj ban-yatra; encyclopaedic ritual codes covering the personal and community religious and cultural life; studies on extant culinary traditions; further study of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century unique built heritage through precise architectural measured drawings and photographic documentation; continuation of annotation of bibliographies and a list of audio-visual archives.



The ongoing Vraja Prakalpa project, undertaken as part of IGNCA's Kshetra Sampada programme, envisages not only the study of a singular unit such as a specific place or a temple, but also its impact on the people and the entire interlocking of the devotional, artistic, geographic, social and economic aspects of the sacred centre. Braj also offers an example of how sacred geographies become mobile spaces through an intervention of pilgrims and devotees, who take back home with them paraphernalia related with these sacred sites, including maps, which are both geographical and cultural by nature. They find a proud place in the home shrines of devotees and provide them with a continual darshan of the deities and their sacred abode. This mobility of sacred centres forms an important area of investigation of the Kshetra Sampada programme. .Vraja Prakalpa moves on and with renewed vigour....

Braj is an ocean, Vrindavan is the metaphorical lotus at its centre. Braj, depicted in literary and artistic expressions, is the land of grazing cows, where Radha and Krishna met for their secret night trysts among the flowering trees and creepers, and where Krishna sports with the milkmaids (gopis) in his most famous Maharas-

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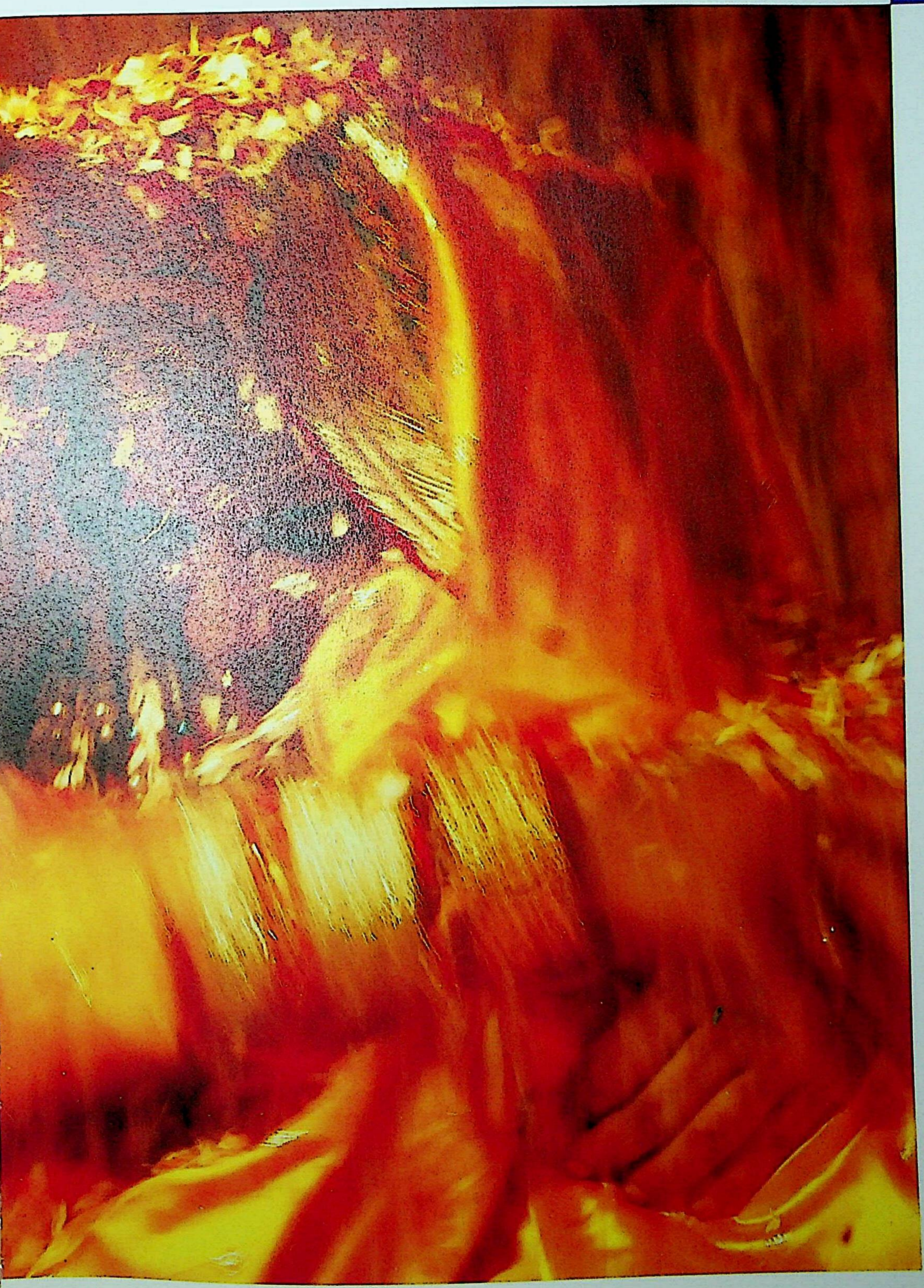

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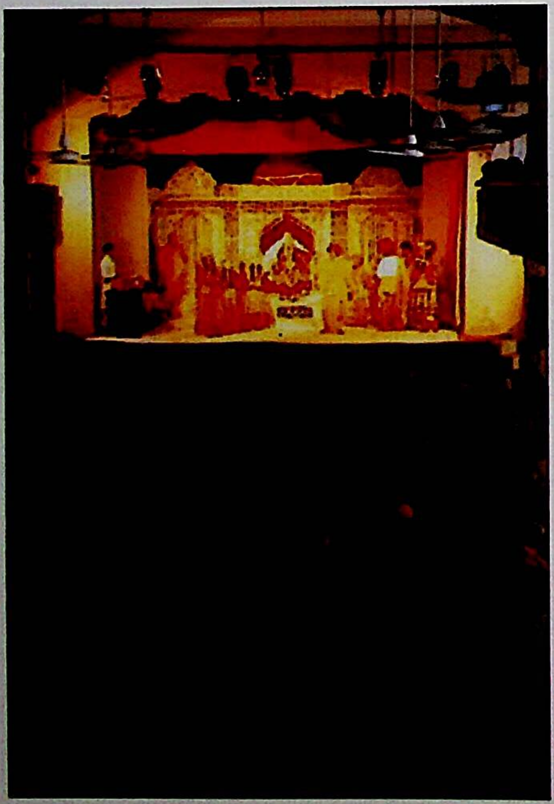
lila, dancing in the light of the full moon on the fragrant bank of the River Yamuna.

Against this background, indistinct in its antiquity, flourished a varied world of art, nourished both by the land of Braj and by its devotees. The Goswamis, immersed in devotional religion, went on to found schools of philosophy, establish methods of worship, and so forth, all incorporating traditional and new ideas of art into the worship of Radha and Krishna in their land of Braj.

In the field of music, for example, the *ras-lila* and *samaj* traditions are both related to classical Dhrupad, but aimed at a specific function: to promote devotional feelings for Radha and Krishna. In 1535, Narayana Bhatta, from Telangana, settled in Braj. He included the performance of ras-lila in the ban-yatra, the pilgrimage which encompasses all the sacred places of Krishna's lilas within the traditional 84 kos (300-kilometer circumference) of the Braj area. Thus, the sports of Krishna were recreated at the very sites where they were originally performed. These Budhi-laila (ancient plays) are probably the longest-surviving processional theatre anywhere.

Nowadays, Braj is covered with rasa-mandalas, the round, raised platforms on which ras-lilas are performed.



Samaj, an assembly of musicians, is an ancient liturgical tradition, also revived for Krishna worship in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Verses written by the great saints of Braj are sung in Dhrupad style. Samaj is performed daily in certain temples of Vrindavan, and in others only on festive occasions. From both the ras-lila and samaj traditions further art forms developed, which are described below.

DHRUPAD

The *Bhagavata Purana* tells us that Lalita sakhi sang in Dhrupad style during the famous Maharasa dance. Dhrupad means "fixed verse", that is, the verses used are set to a definite melodic and rhythmic pattern.

Its historic development has already been outlined, from its rise in the courtly tradition of the sixteenth century to its demise with the fall of those same courts.

However, even as Dhrupad declined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its forms were incorporated into more popular and enduring traditions, becoming the basis of ras-lila and samaj. Its stylistic eminence is even recognized today, when all royal patronage for this most courtly art form has completely disappeared; ras-lila and samaj repay their debt to the parent tradition of Dhrupad by promulgating its musical form.

In course of time, however, renewed interest has been shown in the parent of so many other traditions. Dhrupad Samarohas (festivals) have taken place in Varanasi since 1976, and with that renewal of interest, the cycle seems to have been reinvigorated. There have been Dhrupad Samarohas in Vrindavan since 1979, where the tradition of Dhrupad had always continued in the ras-lila, and there has also been a Samaroha in Nathadwara, itself closely allied with the Dhrupad tradition through its own musical form of temple worship known as Haveli Sangit.

Thus, Dhrupad, one of the few surviving forms of original medieval art in India, seems to be regaining its place in the pantheon of arts with regular events at Jaipur, Delhi and other places.

Since there is no means of reviving the patronage system that once fostered this art, it is obvious that new means must be found to ensure its survival. One such has been the

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foundation of a traditional school, a Dhrupad Gurukula, in Vrindavan at SCPS since 1982, so closely allied with Dhrupad through its own tradition of saints and musicians, who provided the verses and music for the form, and through the continuing tradition of ras-lila-mandalis or troupes, which have utilized the classical forms of Dhrupad by incorporating them into the folk tradition of music-drama to reenact the sports of Radha and Krishna in Braj.

The veteran artists of the classical Dhrupad tradition have become the teachers of a new generation of artists, recruited from India and from the West.

SAMAJ

Samaj has been mentioned as one of the continuing original offshoots of Dhrupad singing. While classical Dhrupad was rehabilitated in the royal courts of the Mughuls, samaj took refuge in the temples, where it was put into the service of Radha and Krishna. The great poet saints of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wrote verses in the Braj dialect describing the sports of Radha and Krishna, and these were set to the traditional Dhrupad style of singing, with some variation.

In the temples, the devotional aspect of the art of music was emphasized. As it survives to this day, the style is "responsive singing", with the verse first sung out by a lead singer and then repeated by the accompanying samaj or group of musicians playing instruments like the sarangi, pakhawaj, and cymbals, all to the chorus of the devotees.

Just as the great saints of the medieval period lived together harmoniously in Braj, the verses of all these saints are included in the samajs sung in the temples of Vrindavan today. Because the saints of that era are believed to have actually experienced the lilas or pastimes of Radha and Krishna, more pastimes have been recounted in their Vrajbhasa verses than in the ancient classical Sanskrit scriptures.

Since temple traditions vary, hence there are samajs sung daily in certain temples, and these depict the daily activities of Radha and Krishna living in Braj. In other temples, samaj is only sung on special occasions. Well-known samajs occur on the birth anniversaries of Radha and Krishna; during the forty-day period between Basant Pancami, the spring festival, and Holi, renowned for its playful throwing of colors; at Jhulan, the swinging festival during the rainy season, when swings are still hung from the trees in the Braj area, and so forth. The temple still remains the home of the arts in Braj, but without additional support, there is danger of even these time-honoured skills being lost. None of the traditional arts of the temple exist

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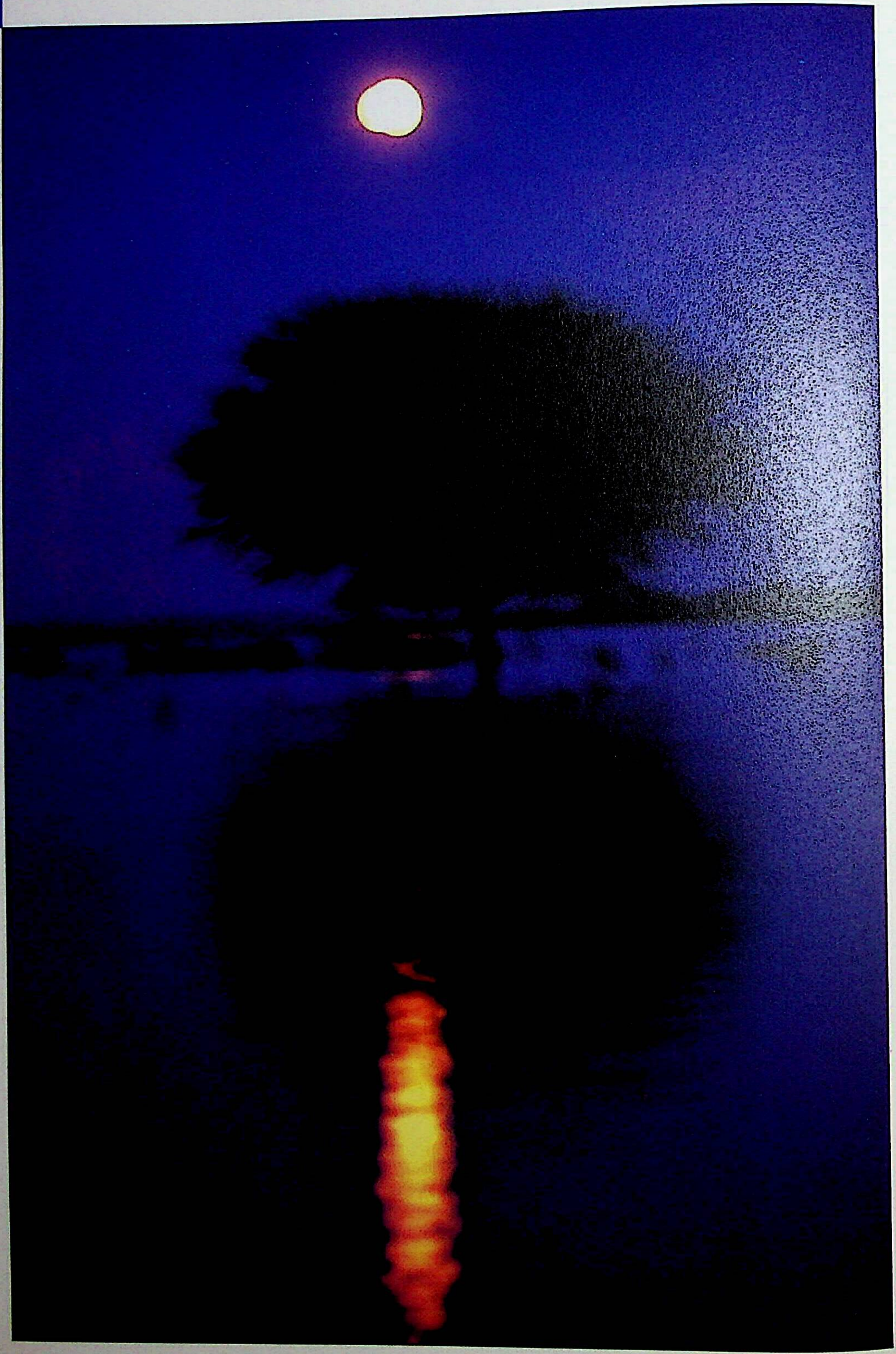

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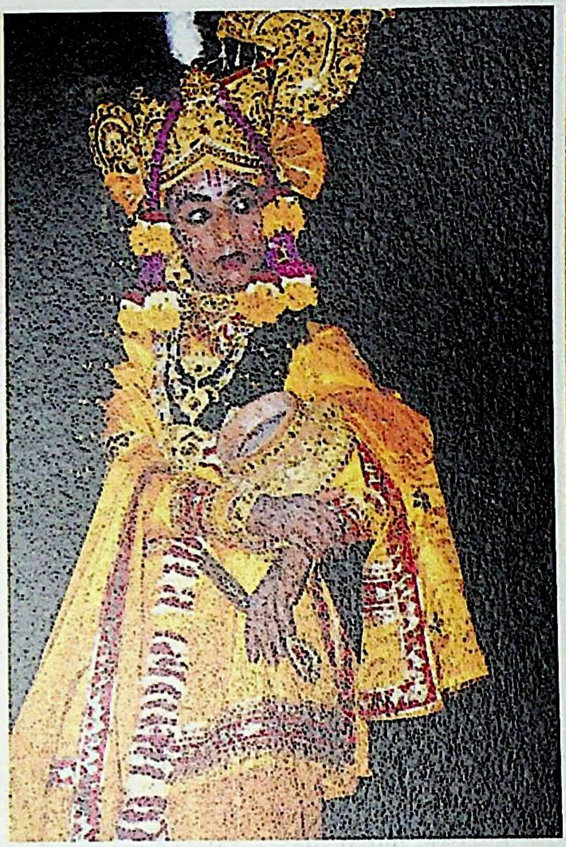

in a vacuum, and it will be seen that all must be fostered to ensure the continuation of this historic spiritual heritage.

RAS-LILA

The history of ras-lila begins with the *Bhagavata Purana*. It recounts how Krishna disappeared in the midst of the dance with the gopis during the full moon night. Enacting the parts of the various characters, the gopis began to perform Krishna's childhood sports in order to bring him back. This ancient evidence for the ras-lila is followed by other literary references and inscriptions. The definitive form of ras-lila was realized during the sixteenth and seenteenth centuries. Narayana Bhatta envisioned the ras-lila as an integral part of the ban-yatra pilgrimage. He was not alone, for it is said that other saints, such as Gamandi-deva Acarya, were also instrumental in shaping the modern-day ras-lila.

In the seventeenth century, the king of Jaipur, Sawai Jai Singh, built the compound, which today houses the Sri Caitanya Prema Sansthana, and organized ras-lila performances there, for the first time outside temple settings.

Even today, the ras-lila remains the means of educating the masses in their spiritual heritage. The inclusion of a sermon by Krishna, an innovation by its great devotee Baba Premananda, has also served to bring out clearly the message of the ras-lila and the spiritual values, which are at its core. Thus, the folk tradition has incorporated the classical tradition, enriched it, and made it the instrument of mass-education.

Ras-lila companies (mandalis) play to attentive audiences in Braj during the monsoon season (July-August). During the remaining ten months of the year they are invited for performances all over India, even beyond the Hindi-speaking areas, and they certainly are one of the most efficient factors in creating a feeling of national integration in modern India, since they inspire integration of the language and religion, through this beguiling play of the celestials.

SANJHI

The temples have incorporated art forms not only from the classical arts but also from folk traditions. One such tradition is the celebration of sanjhi. The delightful background to this festival is the worship of the sanjhi motif at dusk; the motifs are made by young girls on the walls of their homes during a period of fifteen days in order to procure a fine husband. According to the tradition of Braj, Krishna disguises himself as a young girl and, unknown to Radha, joins her in the sanjhi worship, helping her to obtain himself as her husband!

The sanjhis created in the temples are related to an ancient art form described in the Visnu-dharmottara-purana, where it is known as dhuli-citra, making pictures with coloured powders. In the temple of Radha's village,

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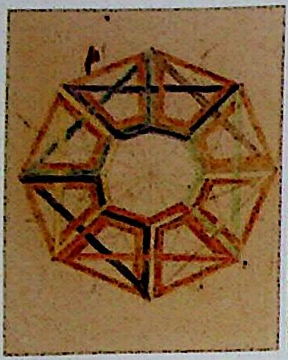
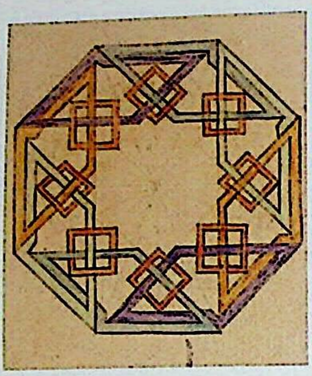
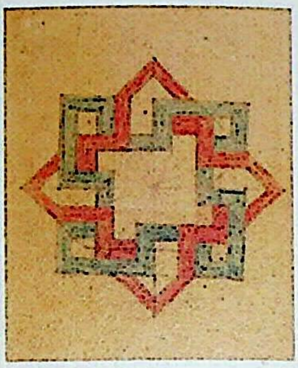






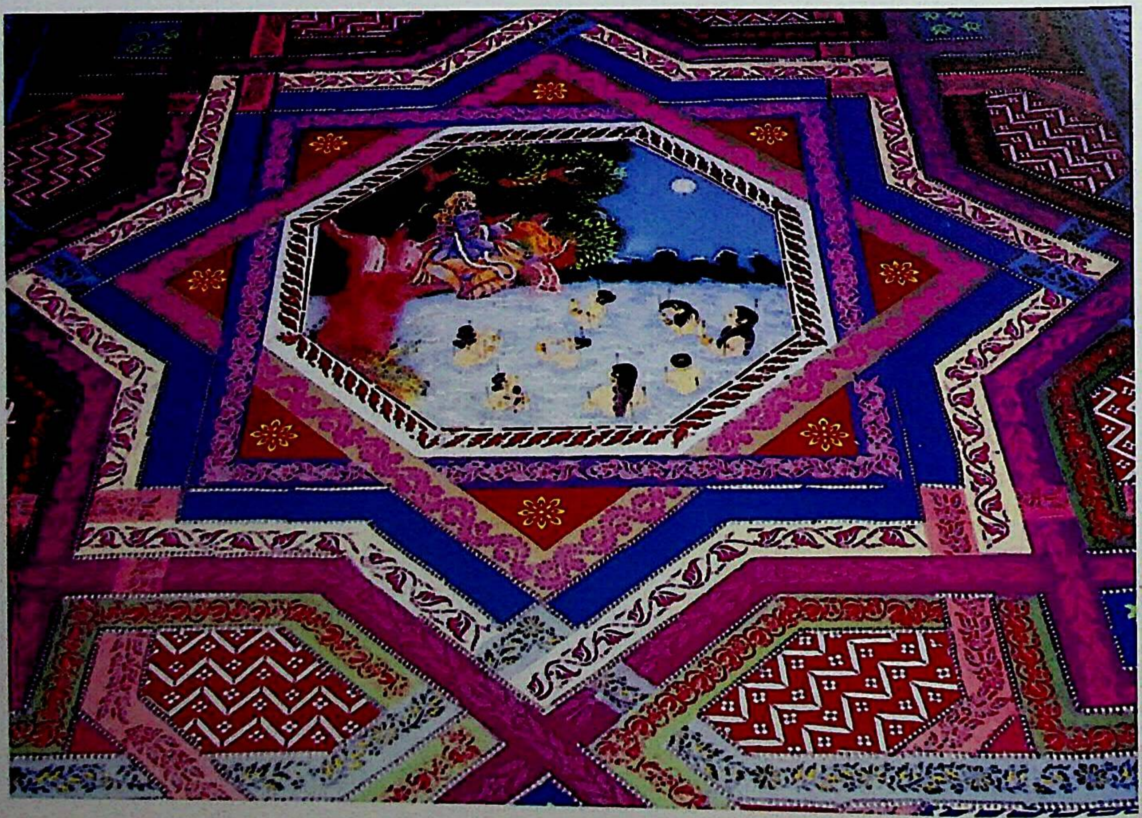
Varsana, the festival and making of Sanjhi designs goes on for a full fifteen days. The various places in Braj associated with Radha and Krishna are drawn in a fixed pattern. Each day's design becomes more elaborate until the new moon day, when the largest sanjhi, depicting Vrindavan the traditional meeting place of Radha and Krishna is created.

In Vrindavan, however, the sanjhis in the temples are made only between ekadasi, the eleventh day of the lunar cycle, and the new moon day. The Vrindavan temple sanjhis are extremely elaborate, consisting mainly of intricate geometric patterns, requiring great skill to execute. Several priests concentrate for several hours daily to complete these works of art, which are then effaced at the end of the ritual.

The entire tradition of sanjhi, from the proper preparation of the coloured powders and the clay base for the drawings to the geometric designs themselves, consists of highly specialized operations.

The sanjhis are prepared on a fresh octagonal clay base each day. The eight sides account for the intricate geometric borders. An eight-petalled lotus is also the mystic seat of Radha and Krishna, and Vrindavan itself is conceived of as a lotus. Either at the centre of the geometric designs, or spread out amidst these designs, representations of Radha and Krishna, Caitanya, or the various pastimes of Radha and Krishna are depicted. Often a special samaj is sung for the occasion.

There is even another kind of sanjhi created with coloured powder in a large container of



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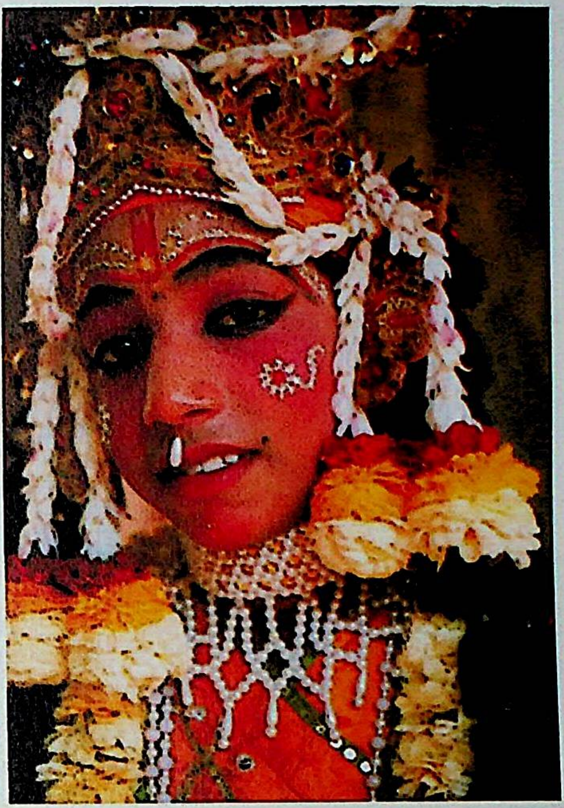
water. It is amazing how the powder floats on the water without being submerged! Truly amazing.

SHRINGAR

Shringar refers to all kinds and varieties of decoration.

Both the images in the temple and the svarupas or child actors in the ras-lilas are honoured with the finest of decorations. In the ras-lila, for example, the floral designs are most striking. The beautifully strung, fragrant garlands are requisites for the complete costuming of Radha, Krishna, and the gopis. Along with these garlands, smaller items, such as earrings of flowers, are also made with great skill and a sense of style; the same may be said for the various flower decorations that adorn the mukutas or crowns which the svarupas wear. It is only when they have been crowned with these mukutas that the devotee feels the spirit



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and inspiration of Radha and Krishna descend into the child actors, who are then honoured as Radha and Krishna themselves.

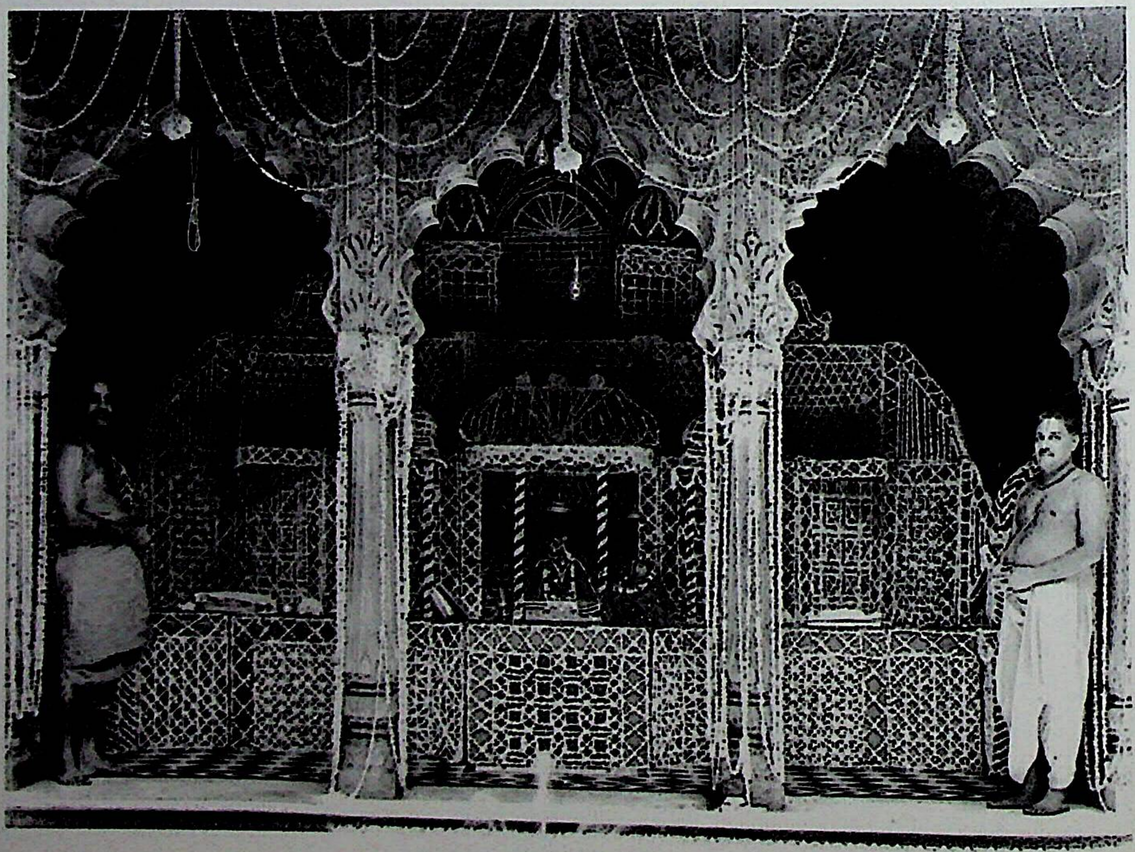
The costuming of the svarupas is also a traditional art of Braj. The design of the clothing and the embroidered fabrics in which the clothing is made, and the mukutas embroidered in gold, are all the product of traditional artisans who make their homes in Vrindavan and in the surrounding towns and villages. While there is little likelihood of these arts dying out in the near future for such costumes are required not only for the many ras-lila mandalis but also for the temple images -- the quality of the work should be enhanced. When these traditional arts and crafts are recognized and fostered by just such an organization as the Braj Kala Gurukula, then there is some assurance that the products will retain their high standards and even improve with modern advances.

PHULA-BANGALA

An extension of the personal shringar or decoration of images and svarupas is the art of building phula-bangalas, literally entire houses of flowers, in which the deities are then enshrined. This is an art particularly popular during the hot season, the idea being that the flower decorations are cooling and the masses of jasmine buds especially popular for these decorative houses are available in abundance at that time. The conjunction of tiny white flowers strung together into decorations, including even in the actual clothing of the deities, and the celestial fragrance produced by such quantities of jasmine, is beyond the power of mere words to describe.

The typical method of making these decorations is first to string the flowers and then to tie them onto frames fitted with rows of nails. An ancillary art to the making of phula-bangalas is the cutting of decorative pieces such as parrots, peacocks, and other motifs and symbols from the fibrous white pith from the stalk of plantain (banana) trees. Incredibly intricate geometric patterns are produced by the tying of the strings of flowers onto these frames; the cut-outs of plantain stalk are also extremely intricate and show a high degree of artistic skill and dedication. All of the above-mentioned arts and crafts are put to one principal use: the enhancement of the sense of devotion, both in temple worship and in the viewing and enjoyment of the ras-lila.

The ras-lila may be called the ultimate extension of temple worship into everyday life, with a concomitant pouring of bhakti or



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devotion into every humdrum activity of the worshipper's life.

IMAGES

Temple worship in Hinduism presumes a highly developed aesthetic expression. At the heart of the temples are the images, which must be made to strict scriptural standards. Casting of images in brass and other metals is another of the important skills still practised in Vrindavan.

During the pilgrimage season, in the monsoon months, thousands of pilgrims pass daily through Vrindavan; many will wish to return home with images cast in this holy spot for worship in their homes and personal shrines. Of course, temples, too, rely on this supply of images.

Images are cast not only in metals. For other festive occasions, such as Diwali, the festival of lamps, images such as that of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and abundance, are made in terracotta; many other terra-cotta figures, such as the gods Ganesa and Hanuman, a variety of animals, from horses to elephants, and human figures, such as gopis, are also produced. These images fall under the category of folk arts. Many of them are brightly painted, displaying traditional costumes of the area. Folk arts cross sectarian boundaries, and so the great festival of Sivaratri, the holy night of Siva, also finds its place in Braj. A variety of clay images are produced for this special celebration, to be offered in worship in homes and temples.

All these arts and crafts are part of a timeless heritage. It is no surprise, then, to find that the folk arts are being discovered once again by enterprising visitors to India.

It would be a sad commentary on our mechanized age should they be allowed to die out for lack of sustained and enlightened patronage. But just as our industries are constantly being revamped and improved, so should our arts and crafts gain from the benefits of modern techniques, and modern teaching methods as well.

To ensure that such forms of artistic expression do not become lost amidst the contemporary clutter of mass-produced consumer goods, the Vraja Kala Gurukula will encourage and promote folk crafts to ensure finer products of the highest human and artistic calibre possible, crafts of which we may continue to be proud.

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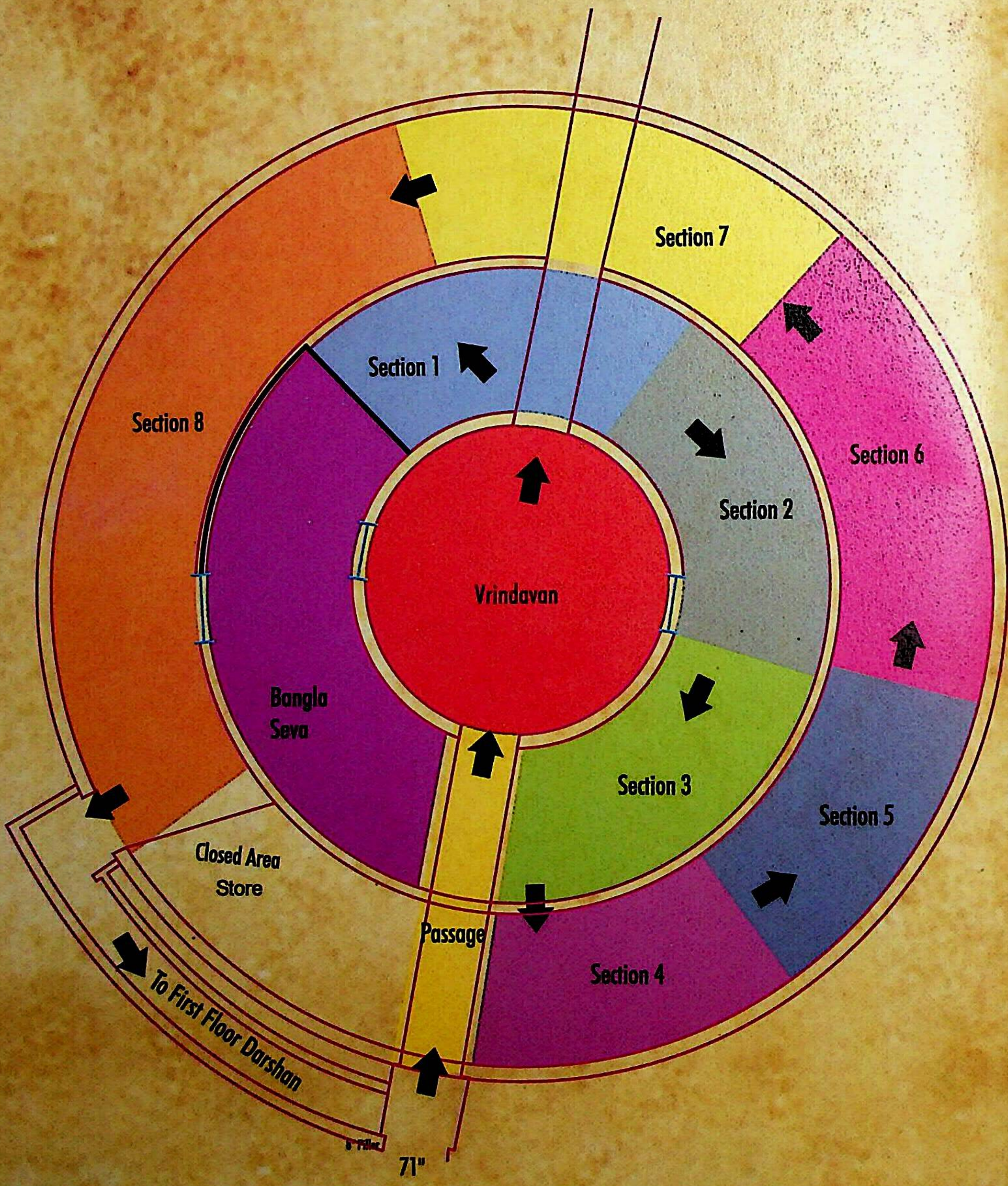

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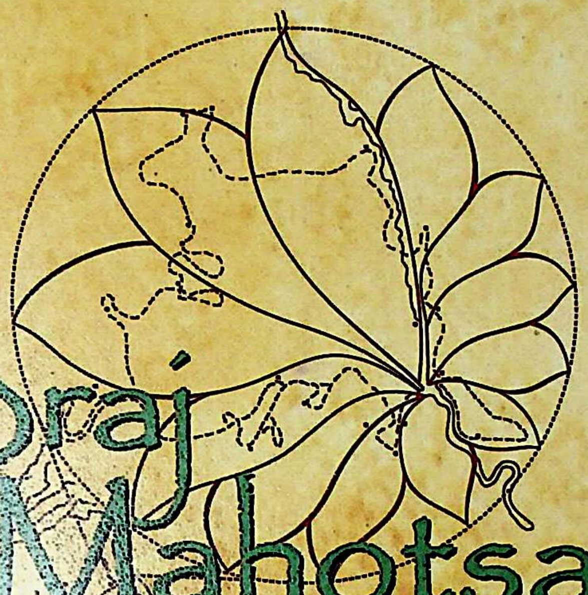
Braj Mahotsav: an eight petalled Lotus



Braj Mahotsav

ब्रज समुद्र मथुरा
कमल वृन्दावन मकरन्द

21 Nov - 8 Dec 2009
IGNCA, New Delhi

- 1. the landscape - ब्रज–भूमि
- 2. the visitors and custodians - ब्रज–रसिक
- 3. the built heritage - ब्रज–वैभव
- 4. the literary heritage - ब्रज–वाङ्मय
- 5. the artistic offerings - ब्रज–सेवा
- 6. the pilgrimage - ब्रज–यात्रा
- 7. the waters - ब्रज–धारा
- 8. the future - ब्रज–भविष्य

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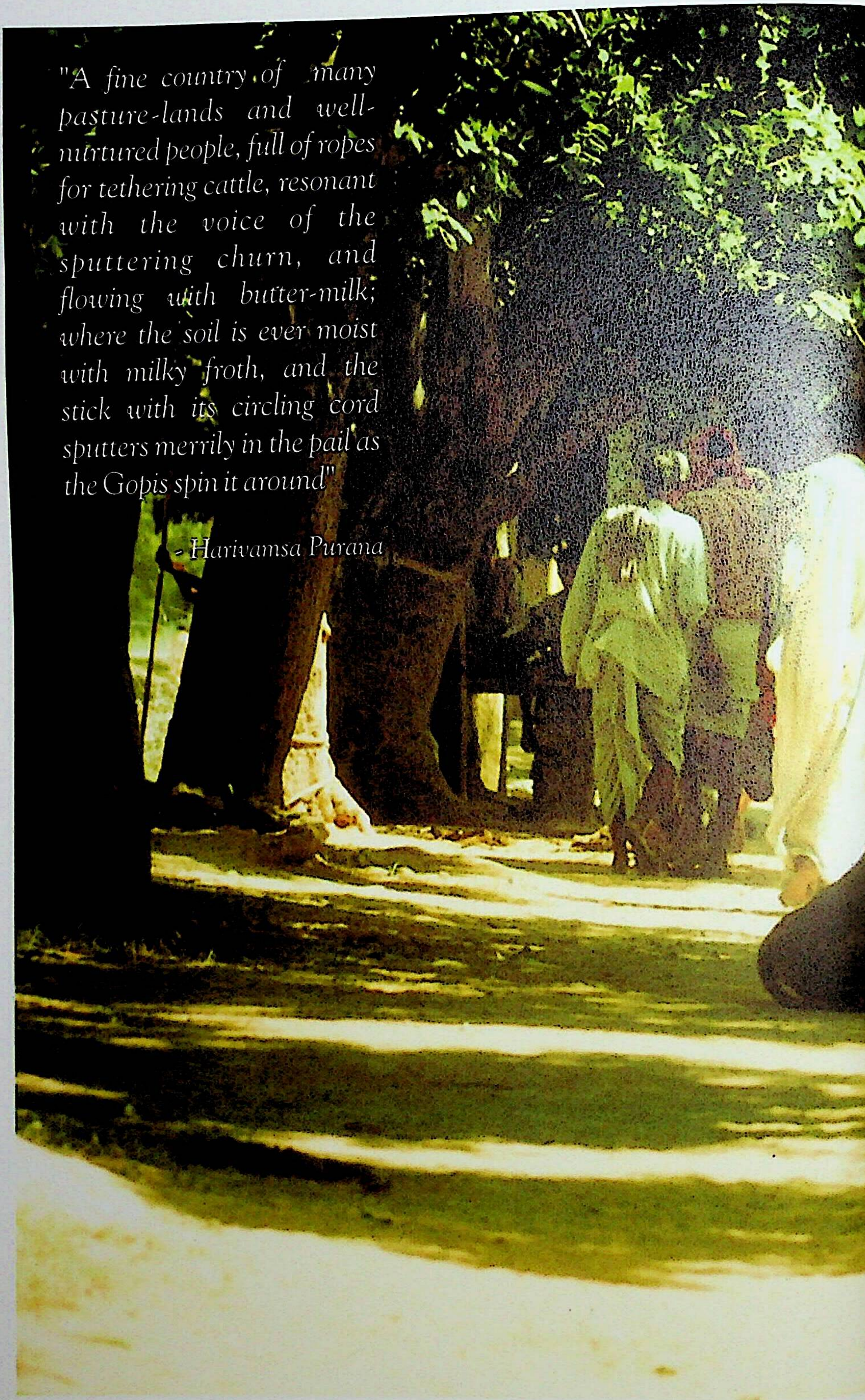

"A fine country of many pasture-lands and well-nurtured people, full of ropes for tethering cattle, resonant with the voice of the sputtering churn, and flowing with butter-milk; where the soil is ever moist with milky froth, and the stick with its circling cord sputters merrily in the pail as the Gopis spin it around"

- Harivamsa Purana

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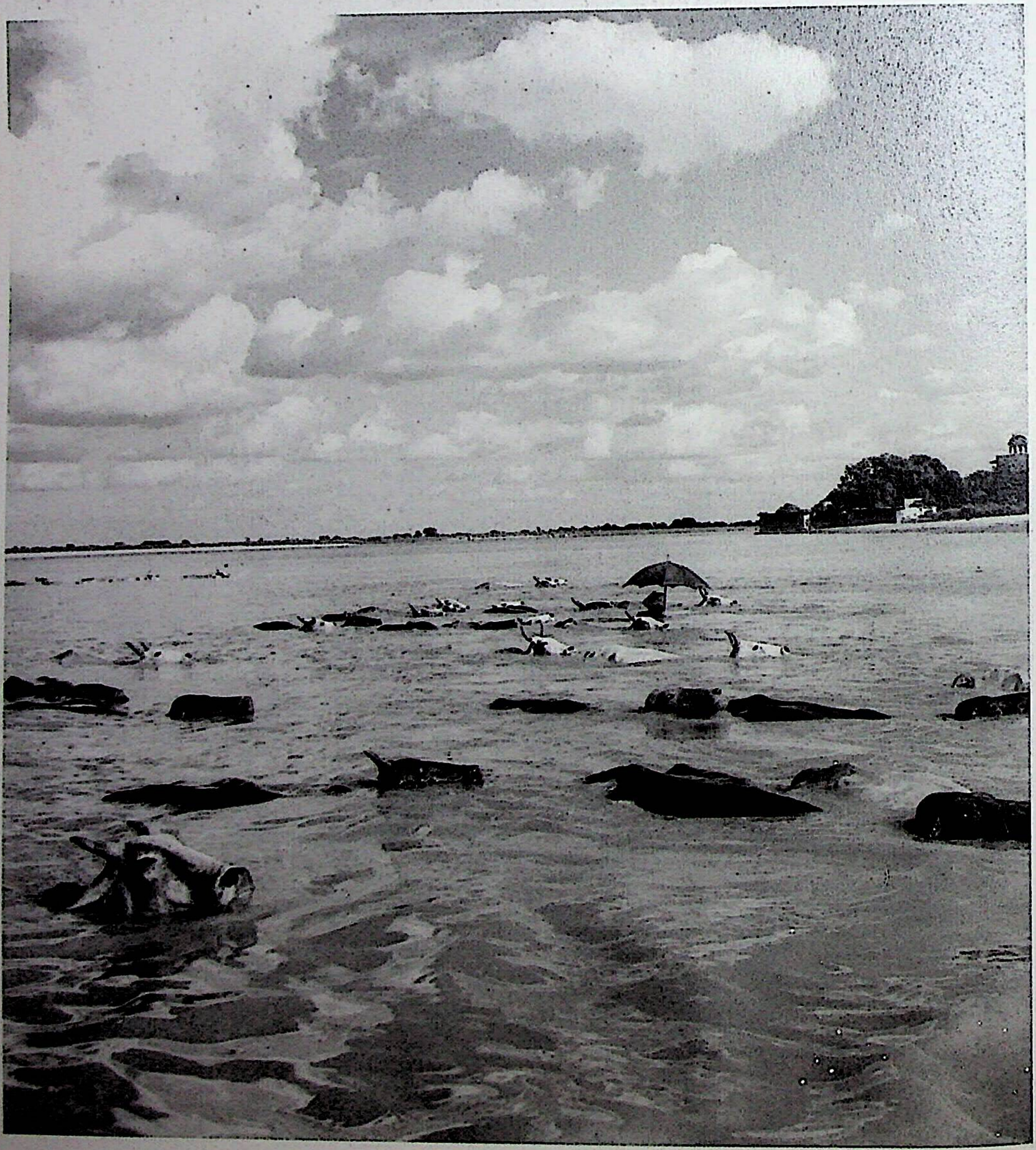
ब्रज समुद्र मथुरा कमल वृन्दावन मकरन्द



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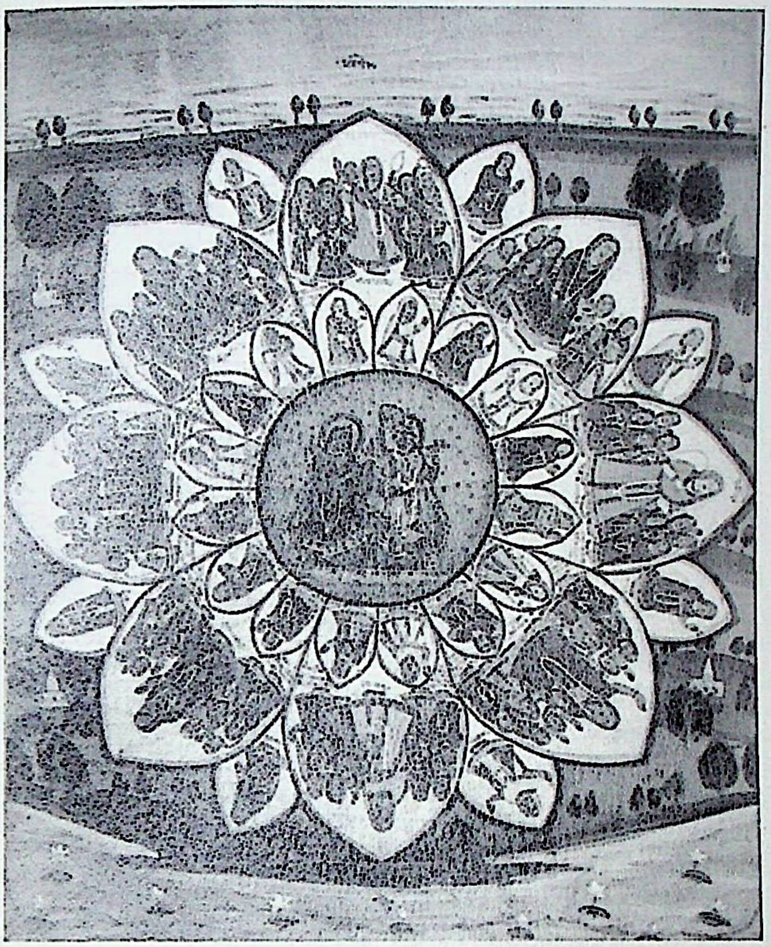

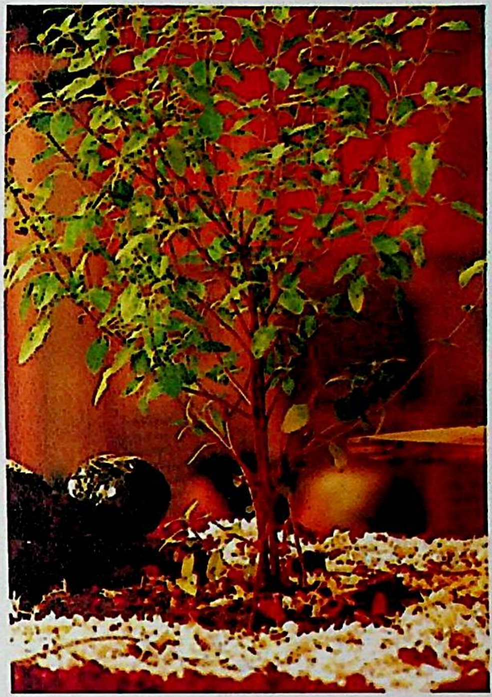

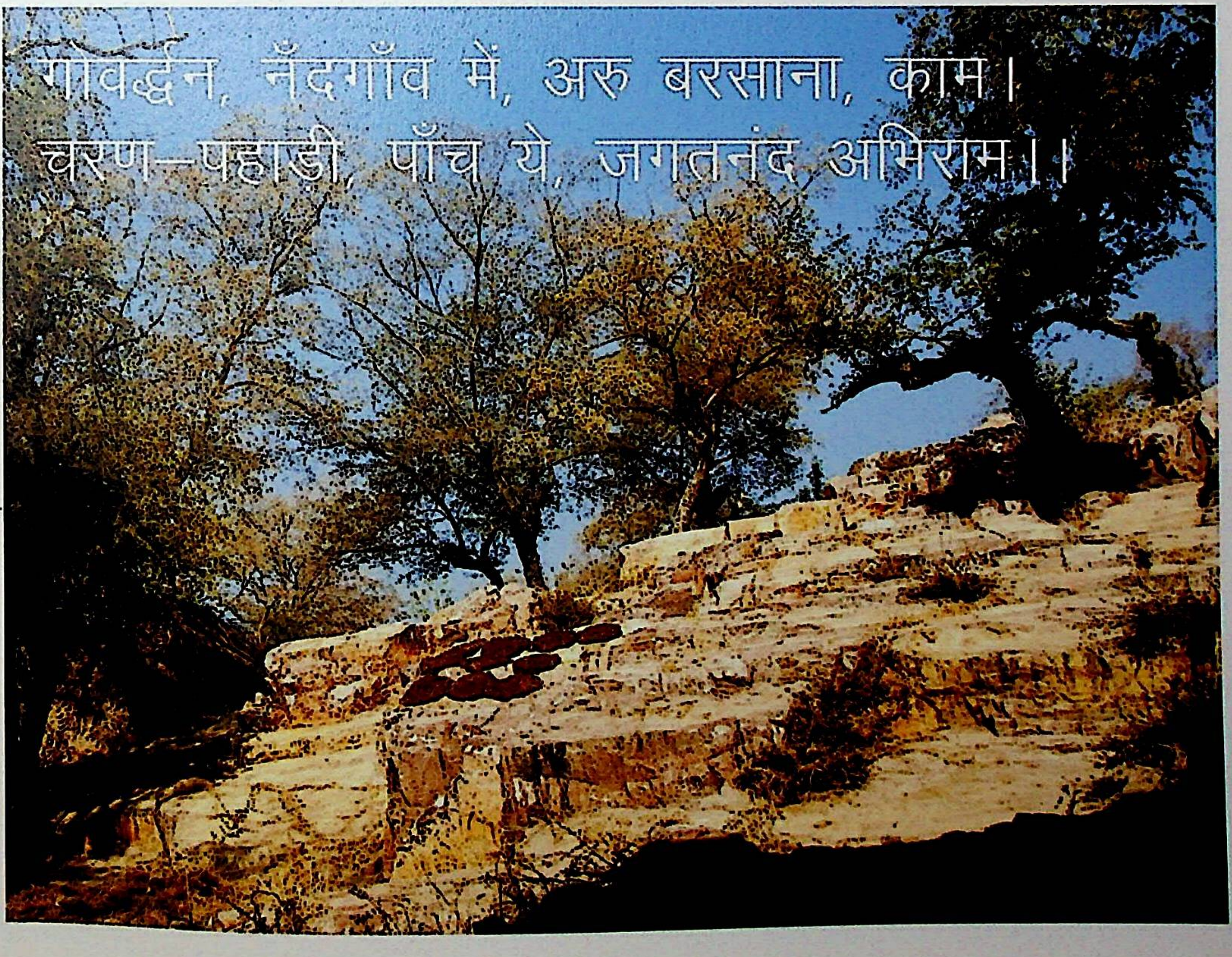

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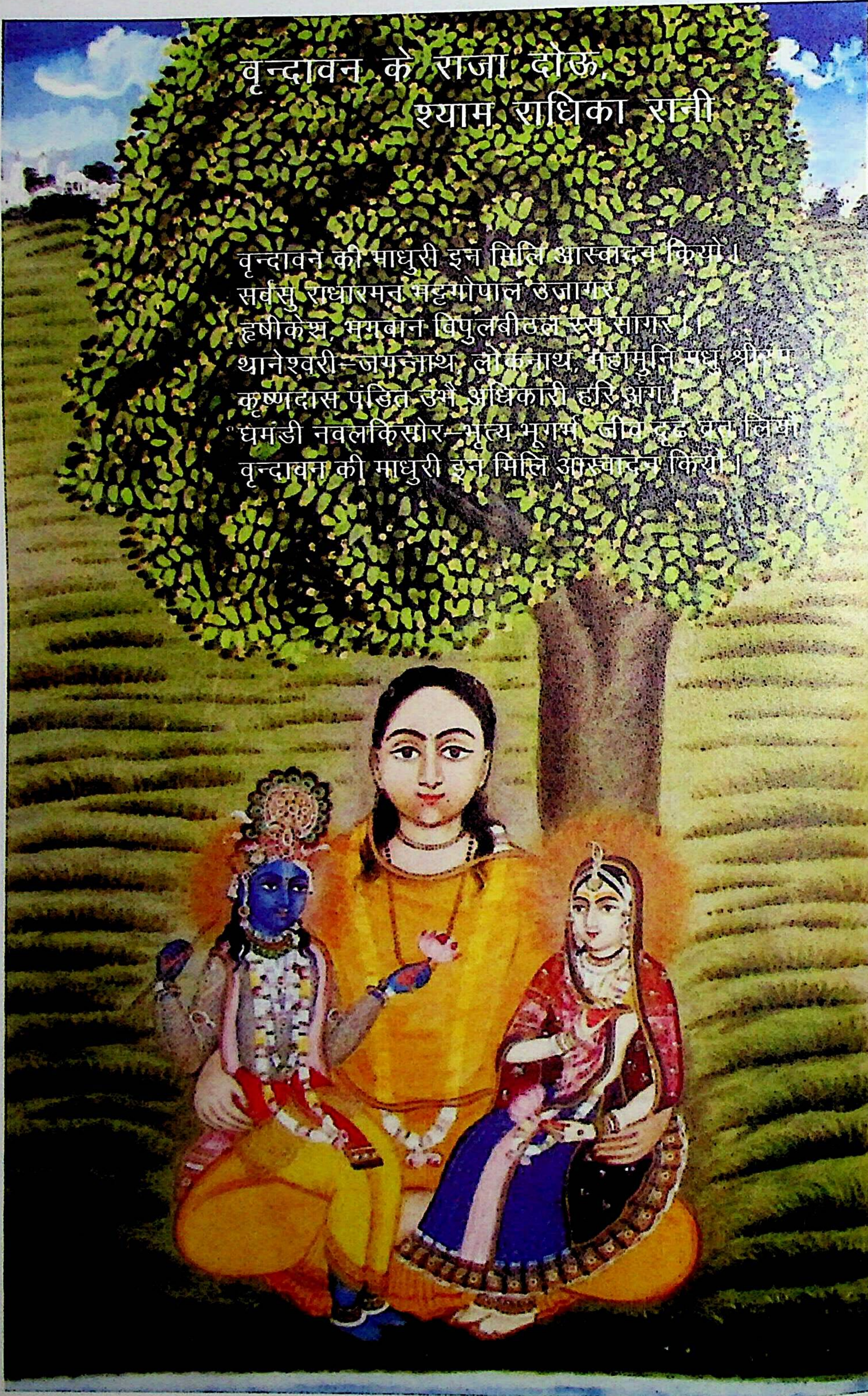

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निज–प्रियस्थान आमार––मथुरा–वृन्दावन
चैतन्य महाप्रभु

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Built heritage - ब्रज-वैभव

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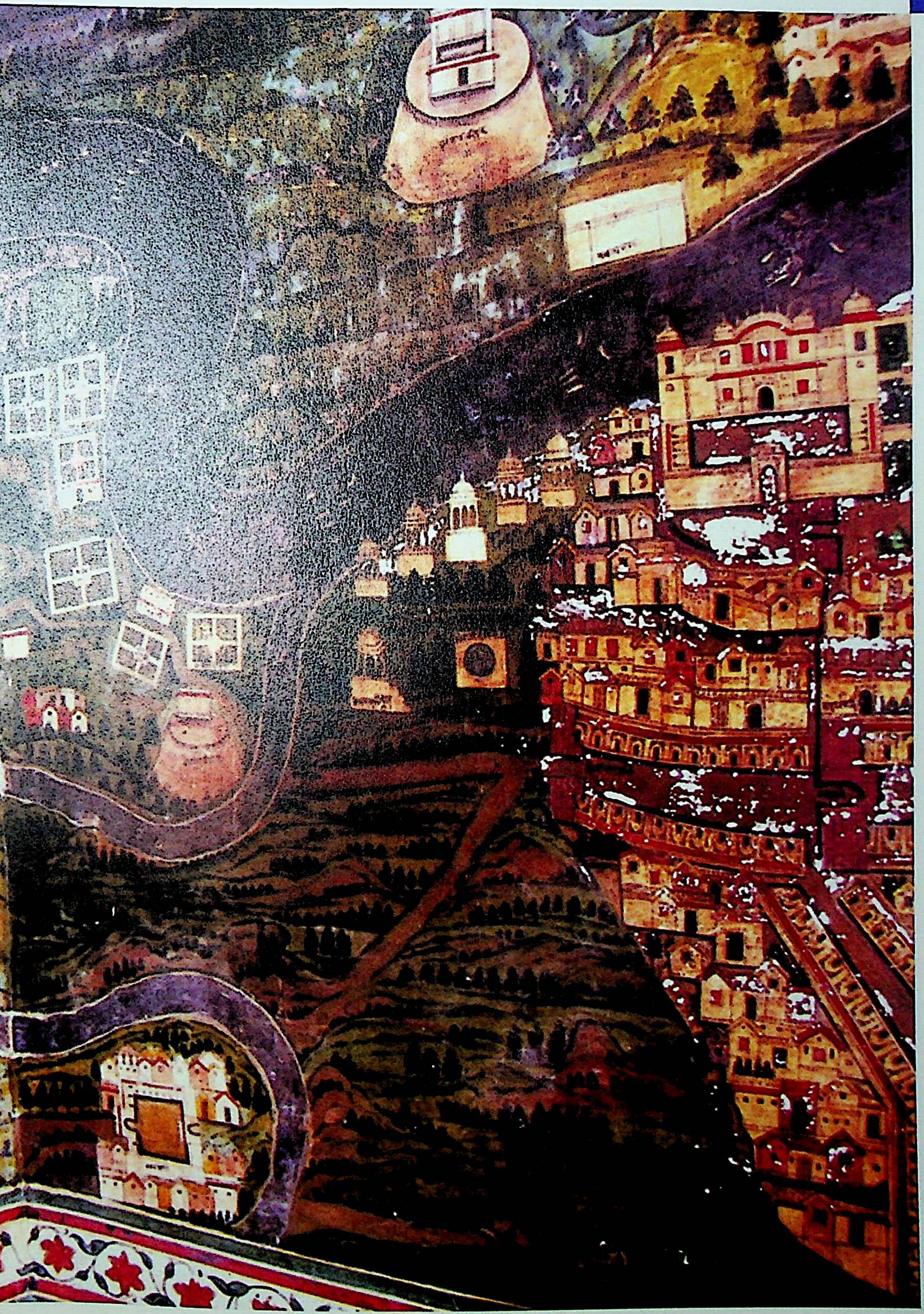

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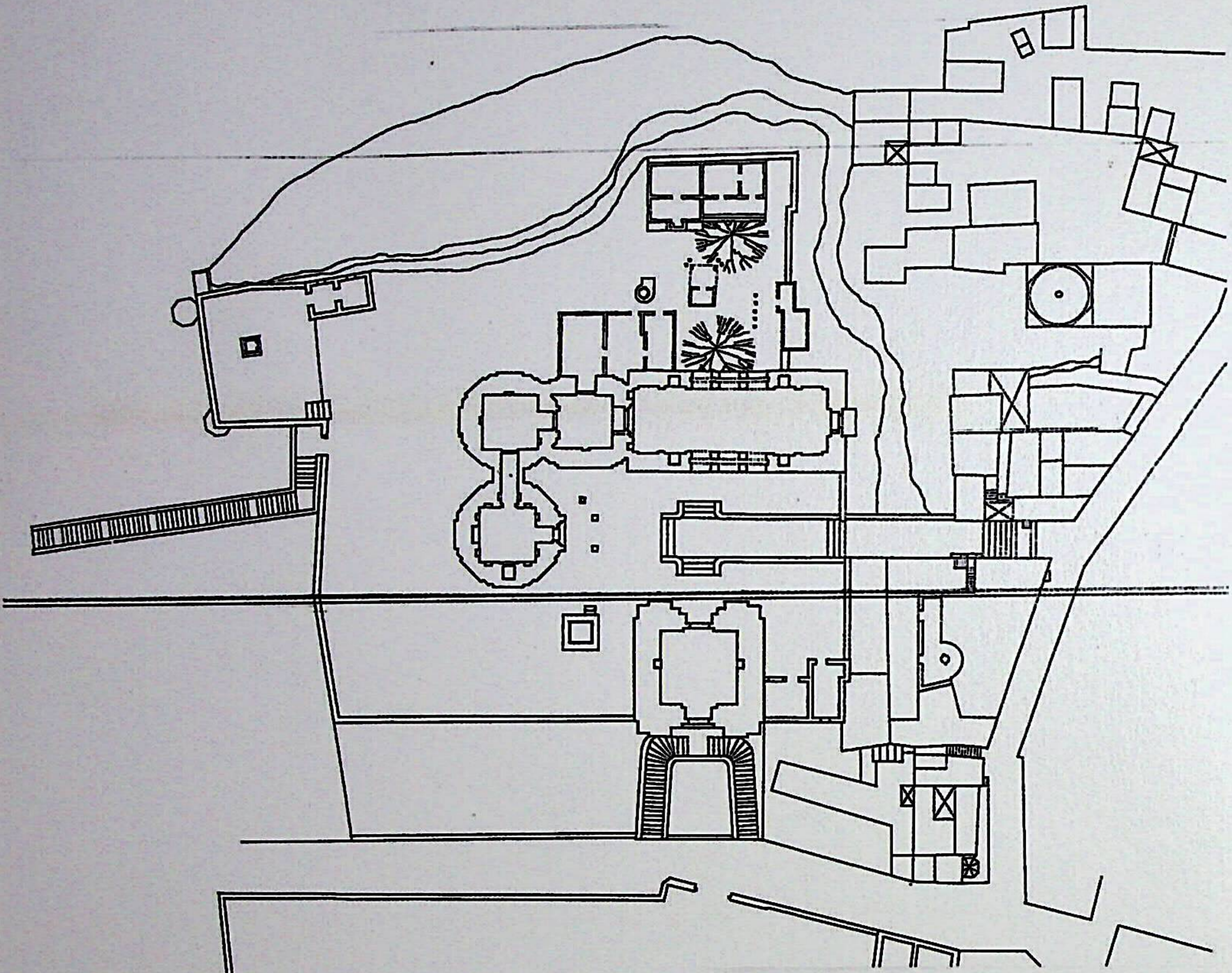

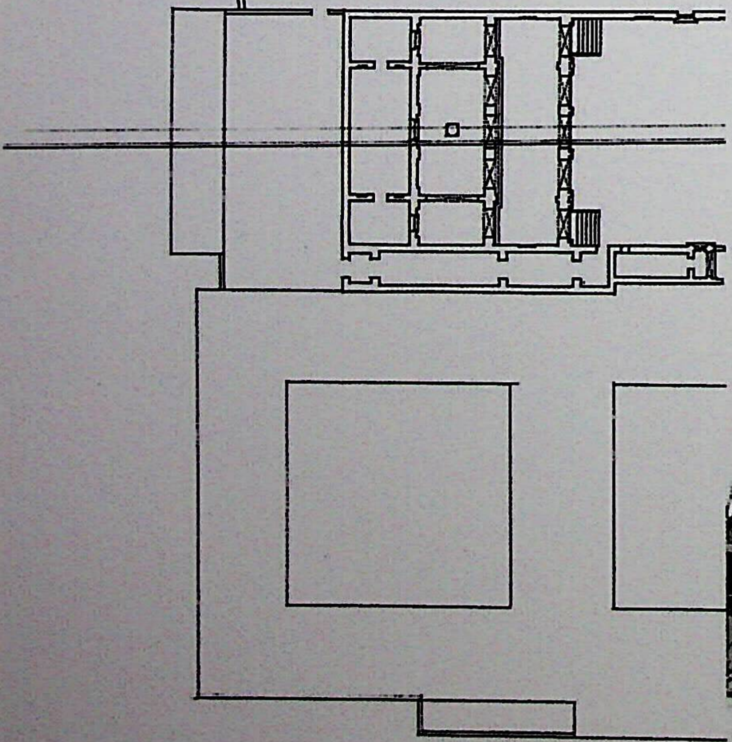

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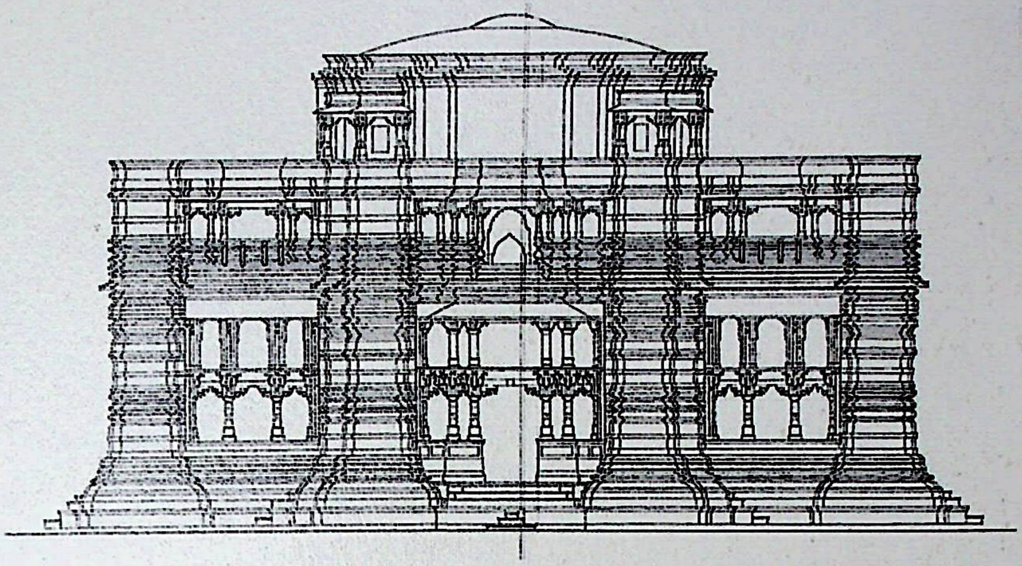
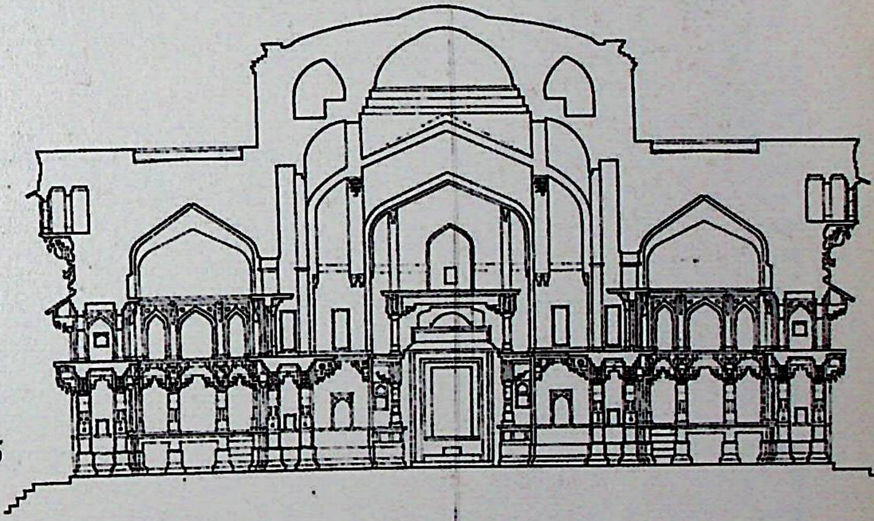
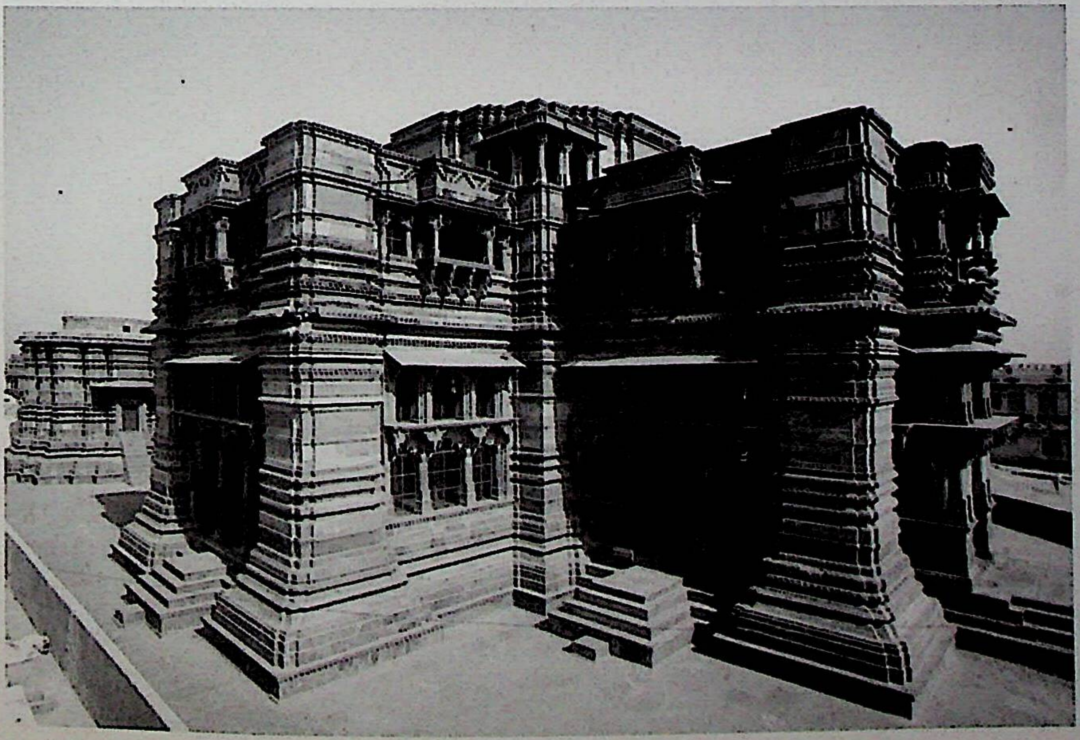


"The said deora (temple) is one of the wonderful things of that locality. The first is a building which is conically shaped. Its height is more than a hundred 'yards' (zira) and the circle of its interior about 80 'cubits' (arash), and from ground to pinnacle, made firm and upright by stone and brick. The building has been constructed near the bank of Jamuna river, and was erected by Raja Man Singh, one of the nobles of Emperor Akbar."

- Mahmud Balkhi, 1625





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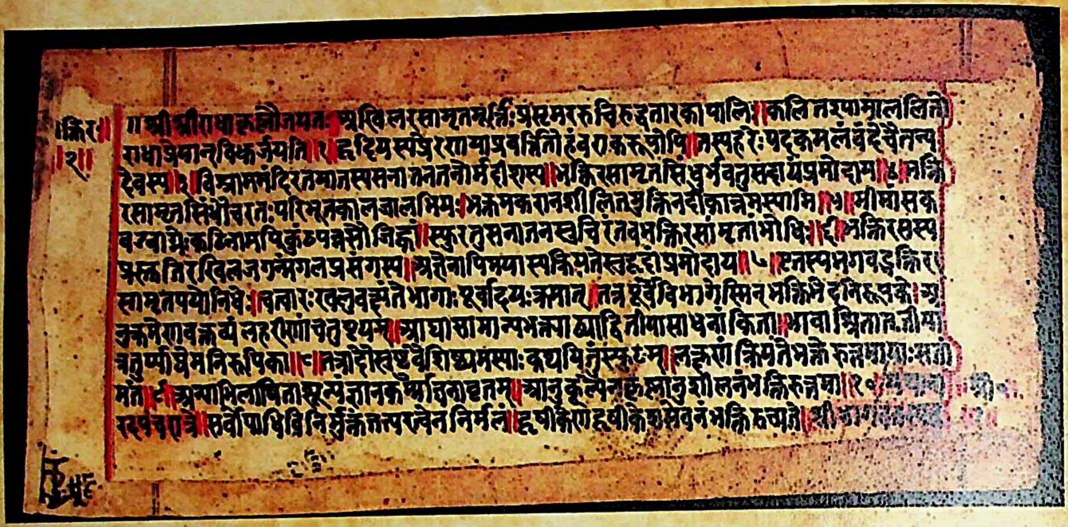

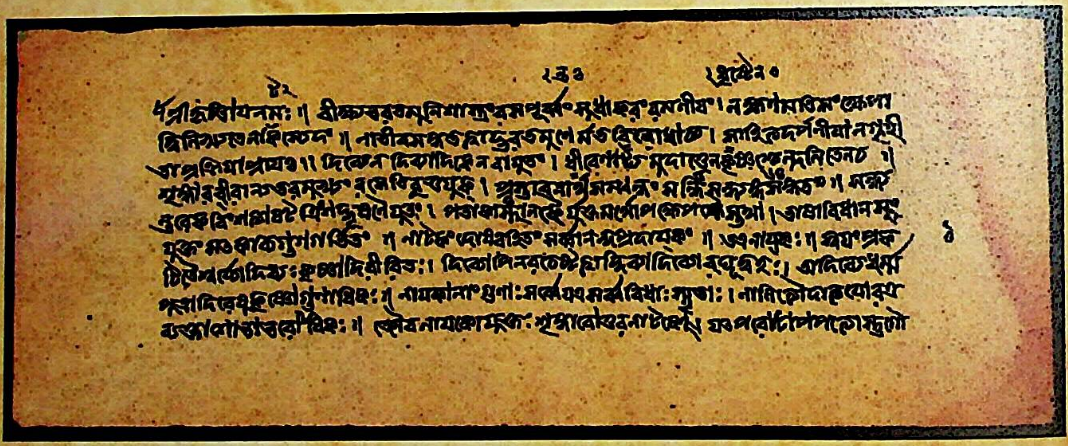

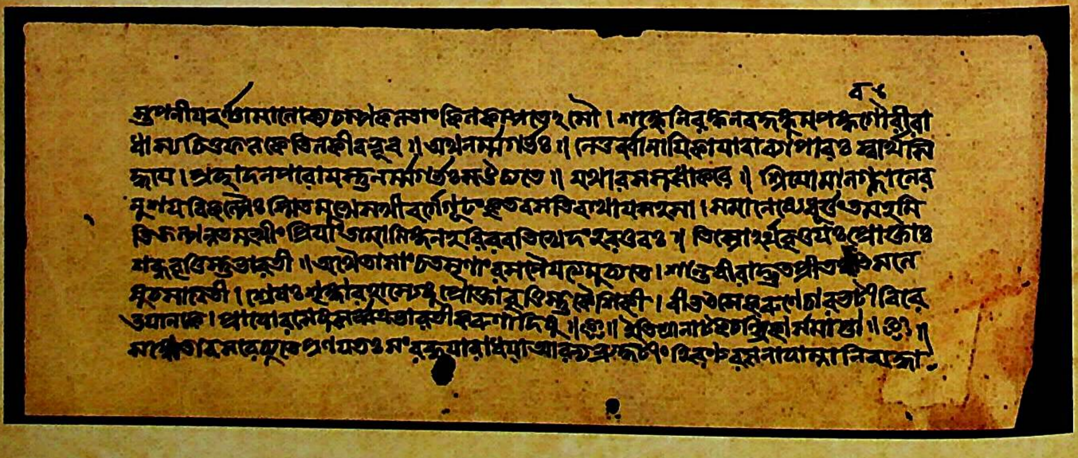

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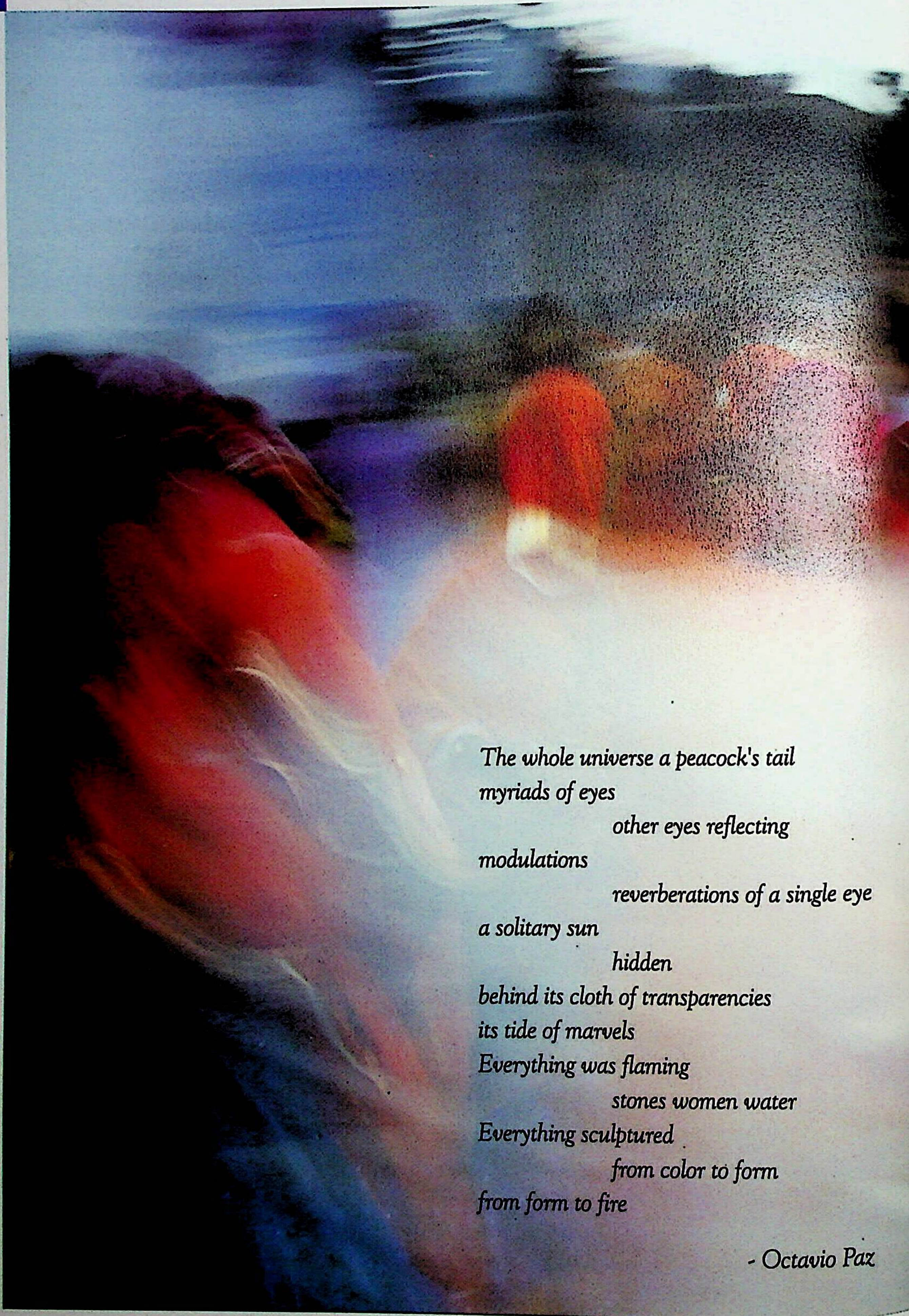

The whole universe a peacock's tail
myriads of eyes
other eyes reflecting
modulations
reverberations of a single eye
a solitary sun
hidden
behind its cloth of transparencies
its tide of marvels
Everything was flaming
stones women water
Everything sculptured
from color to form
from form to fire

- Octavio Paz

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कँमल दल नेंनन की उँनमाँनि।
बिसरत नाहिं सखी मो मन त, मंद–मंद मुसिकाँनि।।
यै दसनँन–दुति चपला हू ते, महा चपल चँमकाँनि।
बसुधा की बस करी मधुरता, सुधा पगी बतराँनी।।
चढ़ी रहै चित उर बिसाल की, मुकत–माल बैहराँनि।
नृत्त–समें पीताम्बर हू की, फैहैरि–फैहैरि फैहराँनि।।
अनुदिन श्री वृन्दान में ते, आवन–जावन जाँनि।
अब 'रहीम' चित ते न टरति है, सकल स्याँम की बाँनि।।

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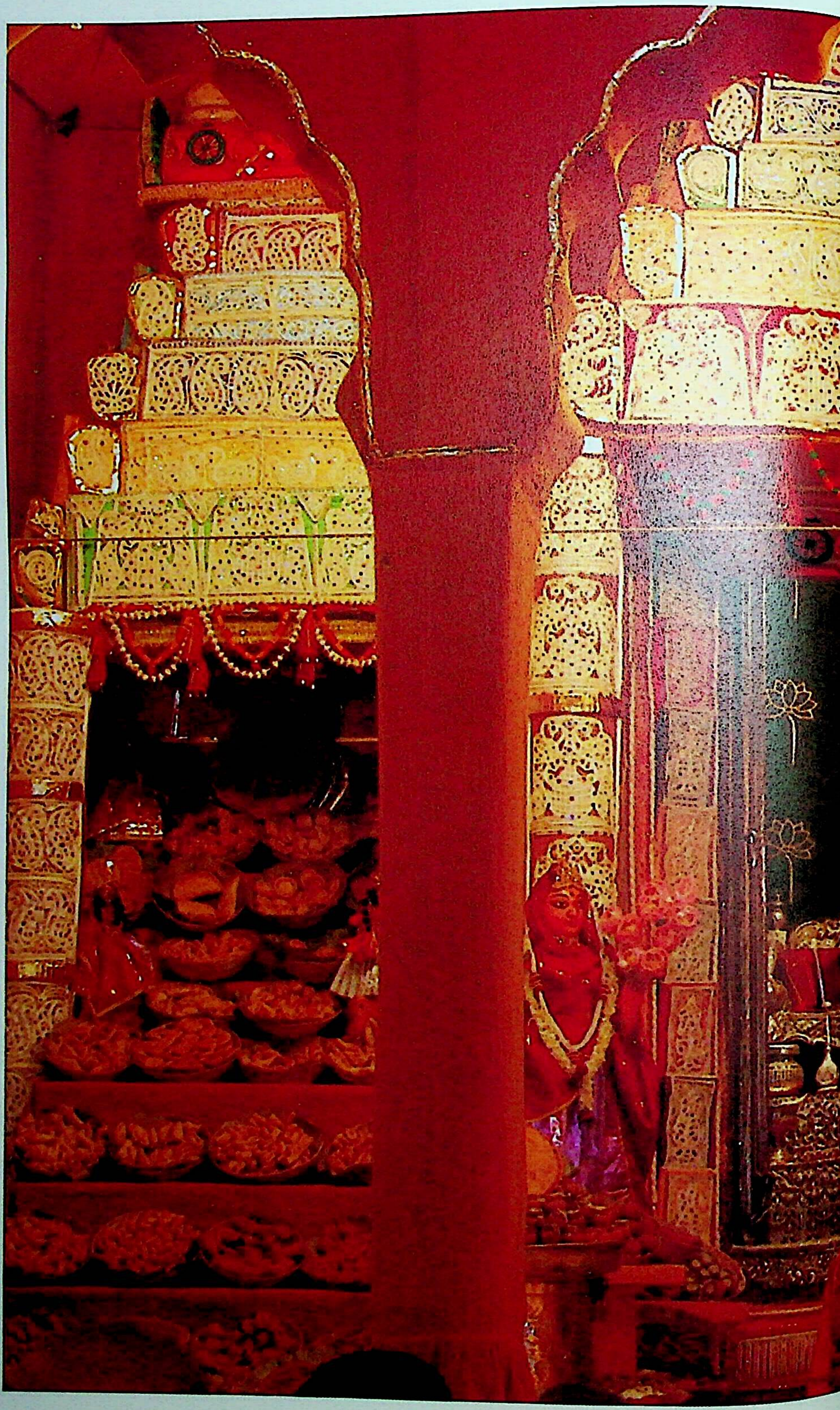

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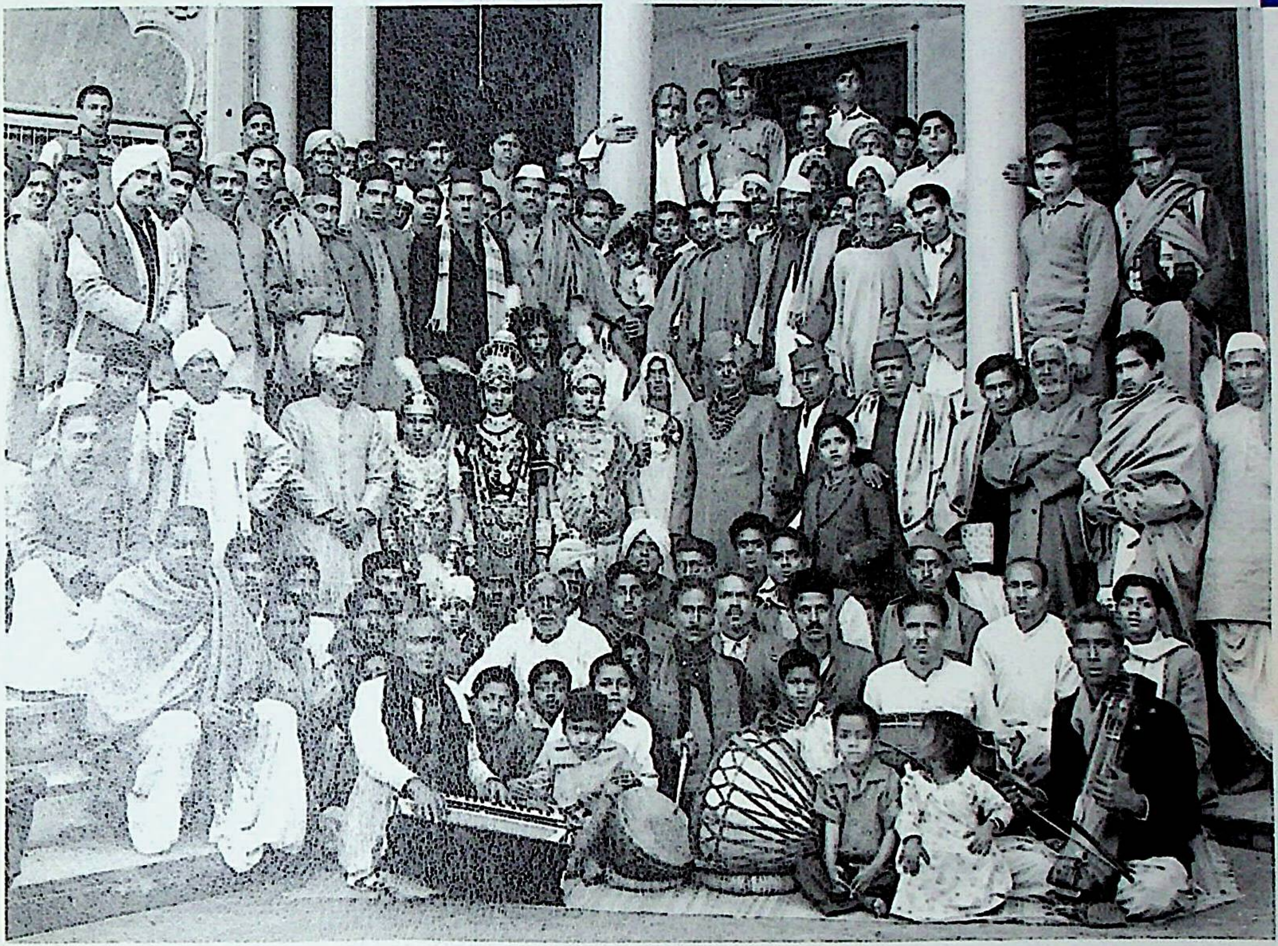

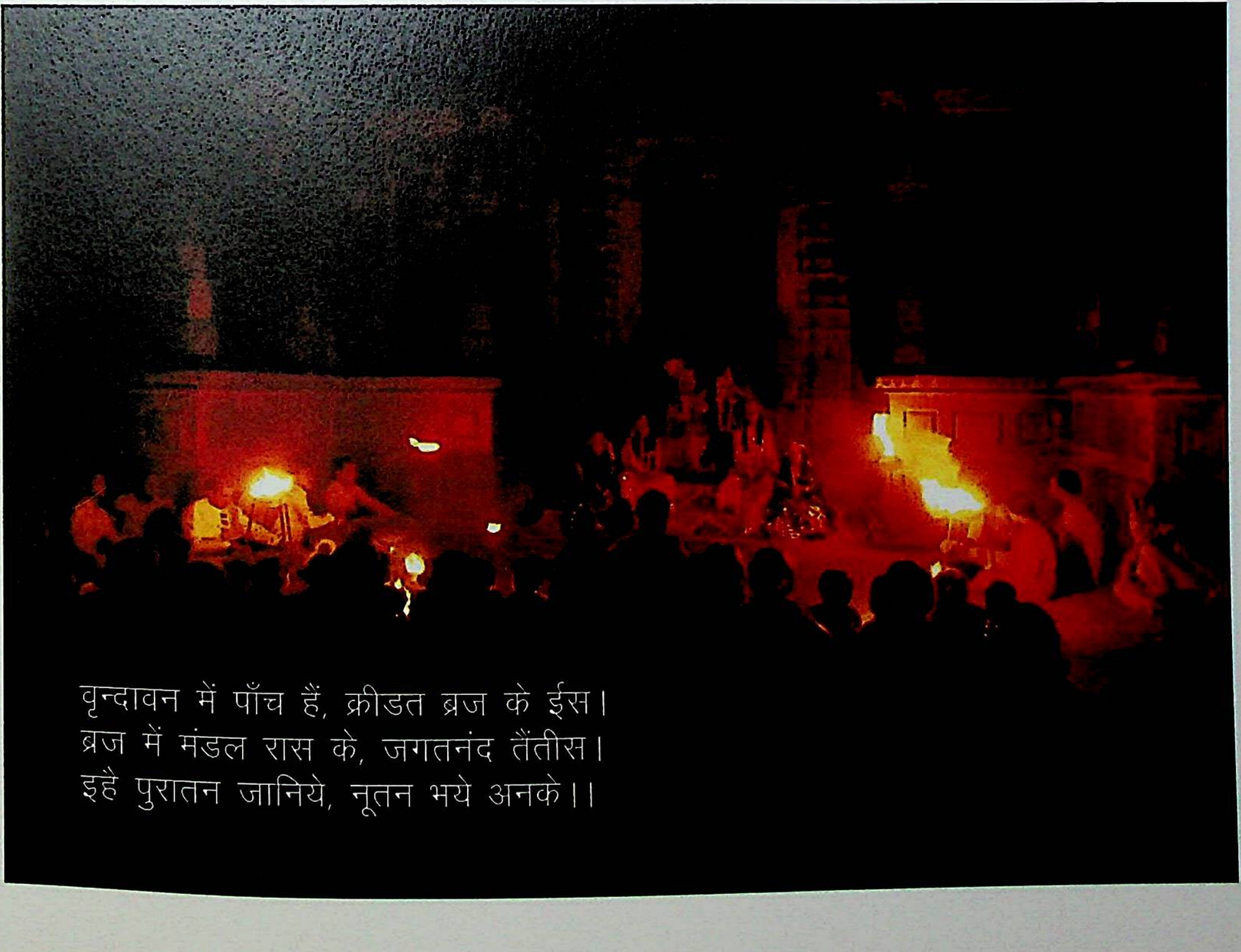

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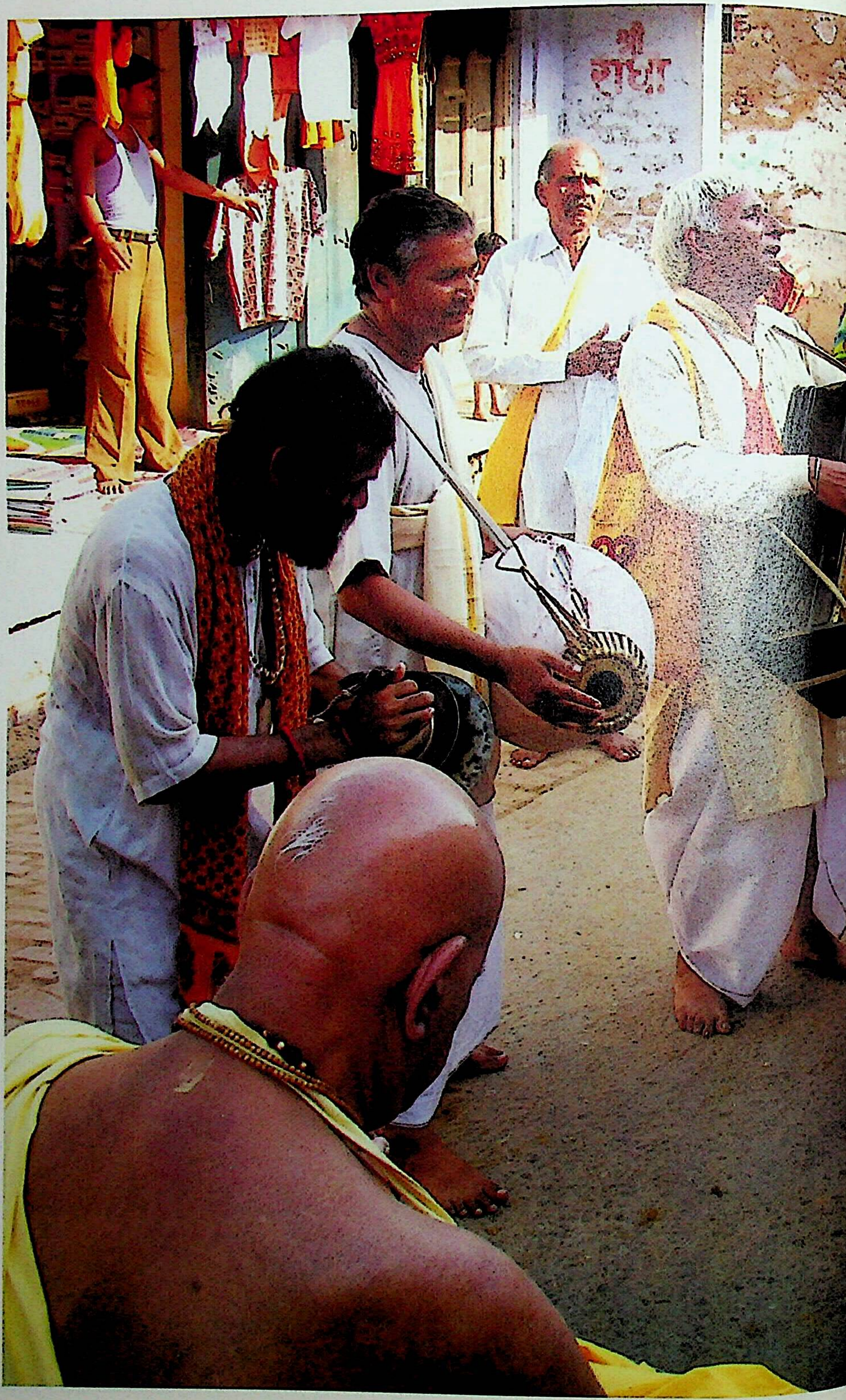
Pilgrimage - ब्रज-यात्रा



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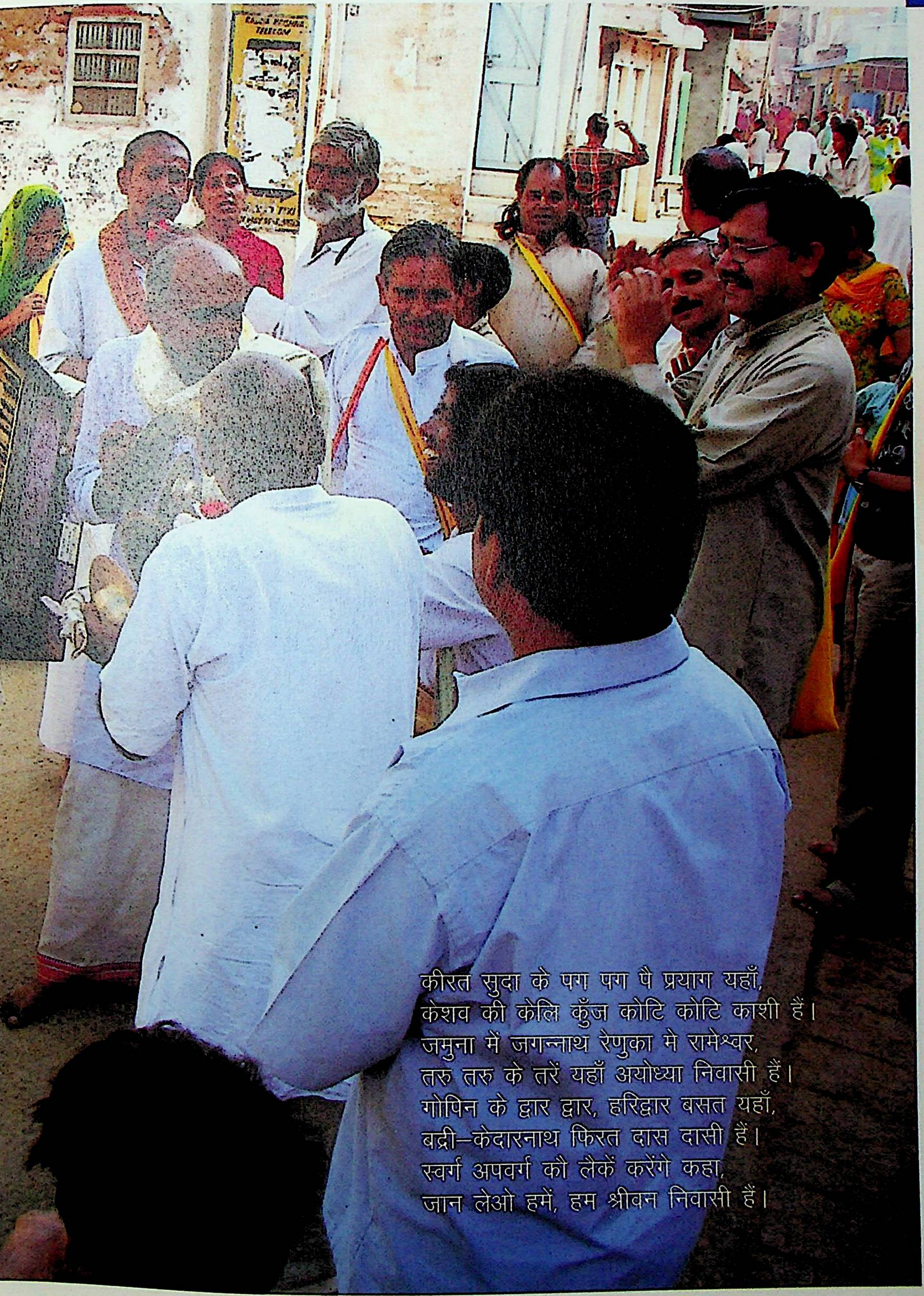

कीरत सुदा के पग पग पै प्रयाग यहाँ,
केशव की केलि कुँज कोटि कोटि काशी हैं।
जमुना में जगन्नाथ रेणुका मे रामेश्वर,
तरु तरु के तरें यहाँ अयोध्या निवासी हैं।
गोपिन के द्वार द्वार, हरिद्वार बसत यहाँ,
बद्री–केदारनाथ फिरत दास दासी हैं।
स्वर्ग अपवर्ग कौ लैकें करेंगे कहा,
जान लेओ हमें, हम श्रीवन निवासी हैं।

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Waters - ब्रज-धारा

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कालिंदी केसौ की प्यारी
जैसे हम पर स्याम करत है, ऐसी क्रिपा करहु तुम न्यारी
जमुना जस की रासि चहूँ जुग, जम जेठी जग की महतारी
'सूर' बुरौ कबहूं जिनि मानौ, कहा करौं यह प्रक्रिति हमारी

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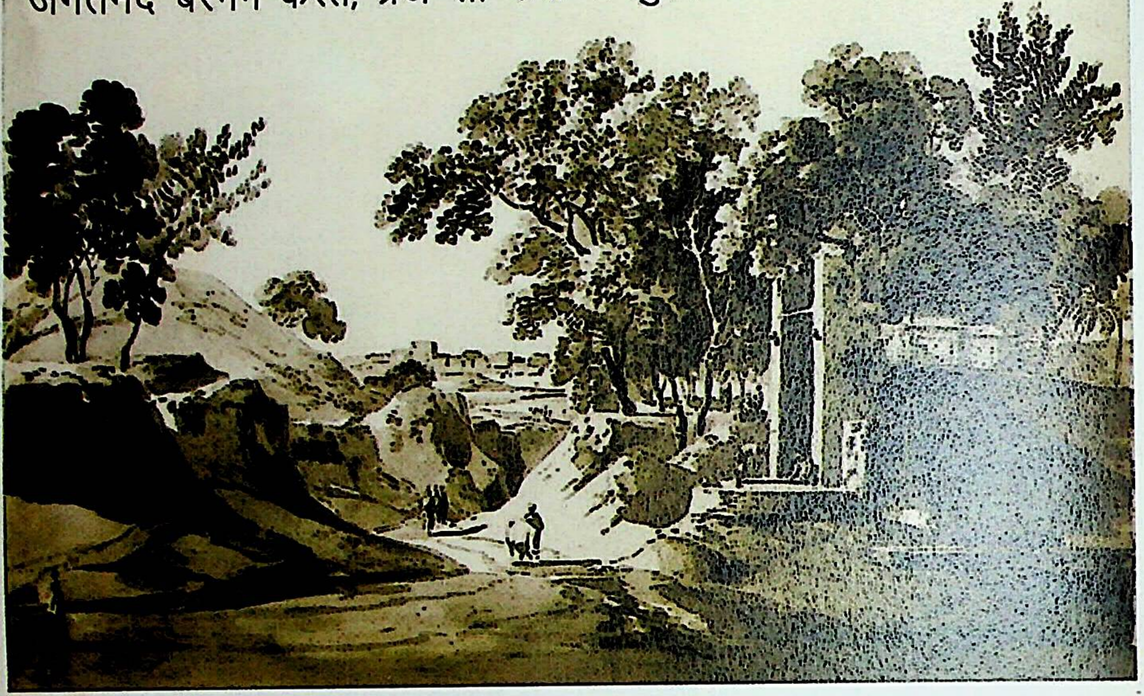
ब्रज में लख दस कूप हैं, सप्त समुद्रहि जान।
जगतनंद बरनन करत, ब्रज सों करौं सनेहु।।



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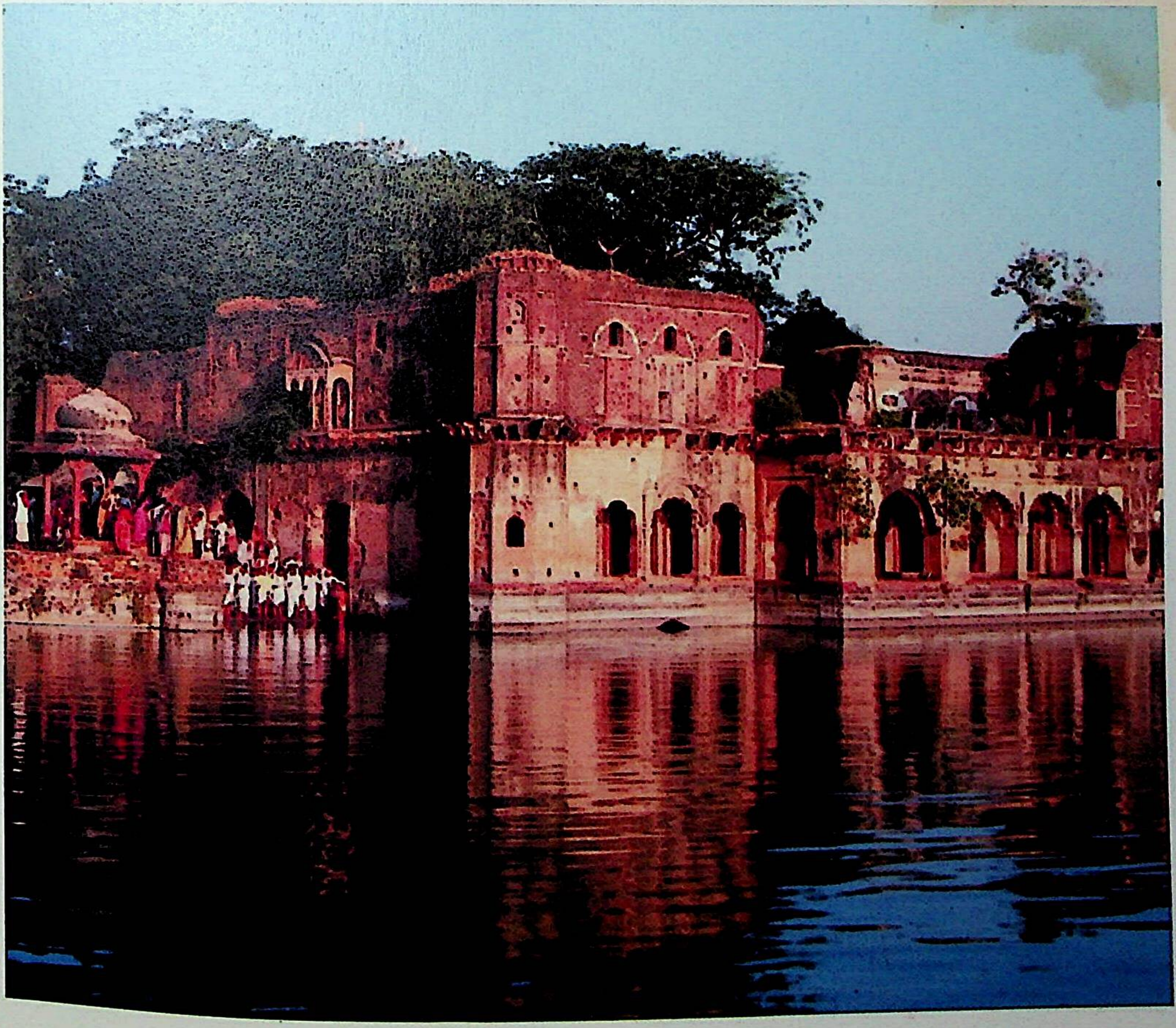

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बंसी काहन अचरज बजाई।

अरथ इसदा कोई विरला पावे,
जे कोई अनहद की सुर पावे,
सो इस बंसी दा सौदाई।
बंसी काहन अचरज बजाई।

इस बंसी दा लम्मा लेखा,
जिस ने ढूँढा तिस ने देखा,
शादी इस बंसी दी रेखा,
ऐस वजूतों सिफ्त उठाई।
बंसी काहन अचरज बजाई।

इस बंसी दे पंज सत तारे,
आप आपणी सुर भरदे सारे,
इक्क सुर सभदे विच्च दम मारे,
साडी इस ने होश भुलाई।
बंसी काहन अचरज बजाई।

'बुल्ला' पुज्ज पए तकरार,
बहूहे आण खलोते यार,
रक्खी कलमे नाल ब्योहार,
तेरी हजरत भरे गवाही।
बंसी काहन अचरज बजाई।

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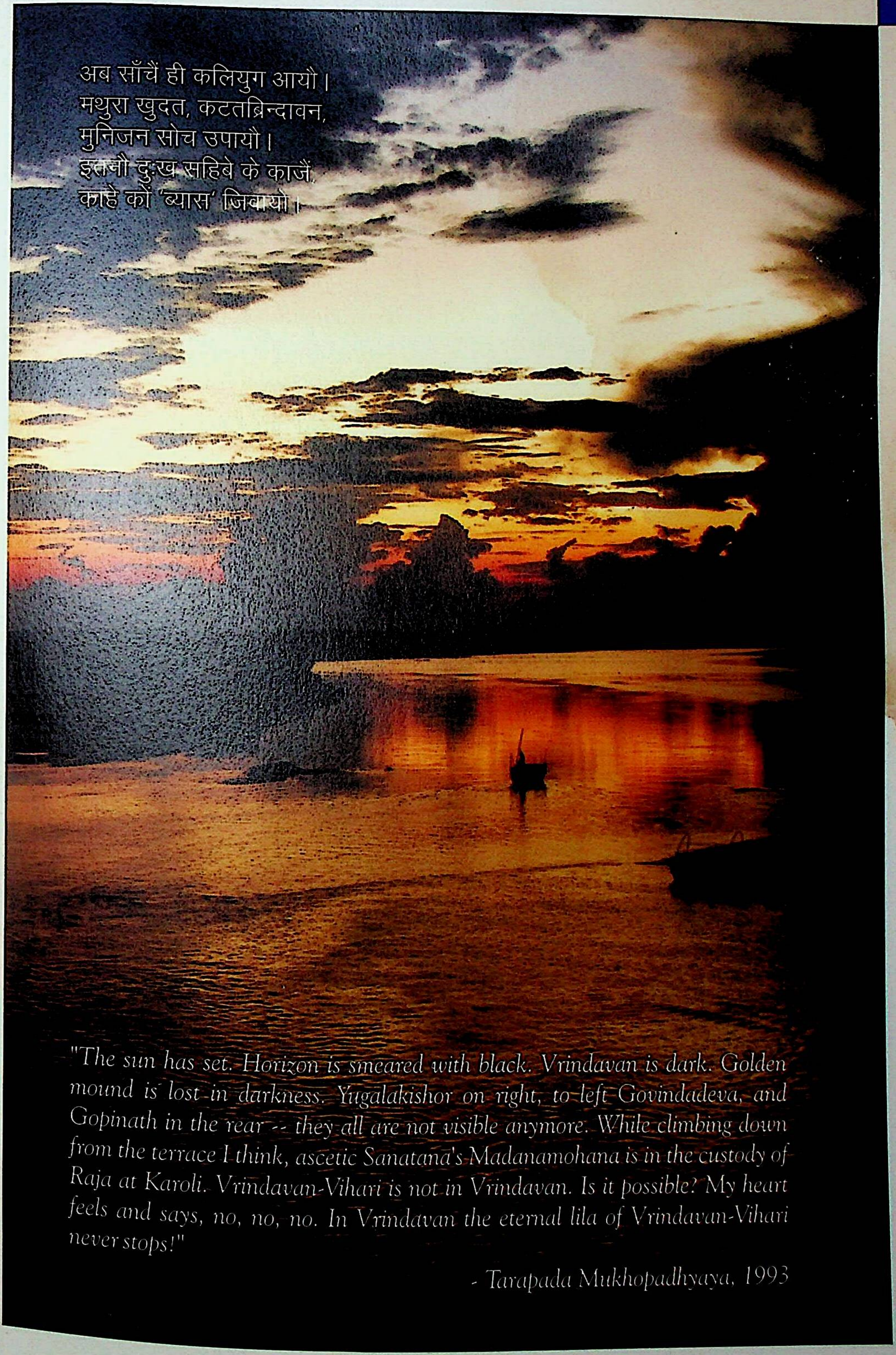

अब साँचें ही कलियुग आयौ।
मथुरा खुदत, कटतब्रिन्दावन,
मुनिजन सोच उपायौ।
इतनौ दुःख सहिबे के काजैं,
काहे कों 'ब्यास' जिवायौ।

"The sun has set. Horizon is smeared with black. Vrindavan is dark. Golden mound is lost in darkness. Yugalakishor on right, to left Govindadeva, and Gopinath in the rear -- they all are not visible anymore. While climbing down from the terrace I think, ascetic Sanatana's Madanamohana is in the custody of Raja at Karoli. Vrindavan-Vihari is not in Vrindavan. Is it possible? My heart feels and says, no, no, no. In Vrindavan the eternal lila of Vrindavan-Vihari never stops!"

- Tarapada Mukhopadhyaya, 1993

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Acknowledgements

Concept & Text: Shrivatsa Goswami

Research: Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana

Special Inputs:
Vrindavan Research Institute
Sri Sri Narahari Sewa Sansthan

List of Illustrations:

	page
Map courtesy VRI (Vrindavan Research Institute)	6
Painting by artist unknown	10
Painting by Bal Krishna Goswami	12
Painting by Jagadish Lal Goswami	13
Akbar's Firman courtesy VRI	14
Paintings by Shashi Kumar	14,43
Lithograph by Lt. Thomas Bacon	15
Drawings courtesy Vraja Prakalpa	17, 40,41
Sanjhi patterns by Jagadish Lal Goswami	24
Painting by Jagadish Lal Goswami	33
Painting courtesy Satayam	34 -35
Painting by artist unknown	38 -39
Manuscripts courtesy VRI	42
Water colour by Thomas Daniell	56

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Jagadish Lal Goswami: pages 26, 32, 49, 52, 56
Paul Kuepferle: pages 36, 37
Shrivatsa Goswami: pages 25, 57
Suvarna Goswami: pages 50, 51, 59

Print - Publicity Design &
Exhibition Design: Neeraj Sahai & Pallavi Sahai, Picture Street

Outdoor Ambience, Stage &
Market-place Design: Naresh Kapuria

Sound & Light: Harish Jain, Adishwar Stagers

Braj Decor: Jugal Kishor Sharma

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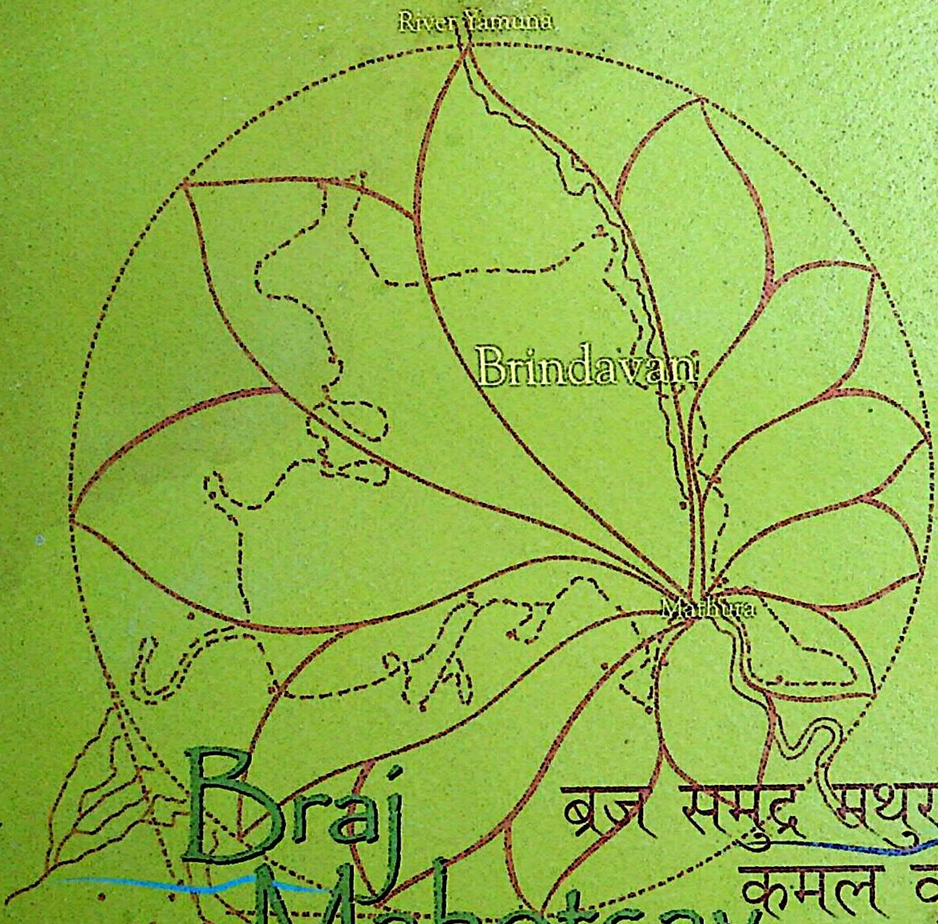

Braj Mahotsav

ब्रज समुद्र मथुरा
कमल वृन्दावन मकरन्द

21 Nov - 8 Dec 2009, IGNCA, New Delhi

Organised by
INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE ARTS and
SRI CAITANYA PREMA SAMSTHANA

Print : THE PRESS 9810056872

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